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OR,
LION CHARLEY'S LUCK.

A Tale of Circus Rivalry.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "PARSON JIM," "JOHN ARMSTRONG,
MECHANIC," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TWO FAST YOUNG MEN.

Two young men were driving along a country road in Western New York, not far from the Pennsylvania border. They were fine-looking and well-dressed, seated in a five hundred dollar wagon, behind a pair of blooded bays that made the dust fly at a rattling gait as they sped along.

The driver wore dogskin gloves, a velveteen cutaway, shiny hat, solitaire diamond pin, and glossy black mustache. He held the ribbons with the knowing air of an old sport; while his companion, an effeminate-looking blonde, wore the same sort of clothes, a match for the solitaire, and was altogether a diluted copy of his friend, whom he imitated in all things, especially vice.

KING PHILIP, WITH A VICIOUS SCREAM, STRUCK AT FLIRT, CAUSING THE MARE TO BOLT ALMOST THROUGH THE TENT.

The young man who drove would have been extremely handsome but for a certain cruel look in his dark eyes, and a way of compressing his lips under the black mustache when he whipped up his horses, that gave him the air of one who struck to hurt, every time.

His friend was smoking a cigar and leaning lazily back as they bowled rapidly along, enjoying the rapid motion, till one of the horses shied at a white mile-post by the roadside, and the dark man, with a furious oath, cut his team so cruelly that the blonde man exclaimed:

"For heaven's sake, Stone, don't! They might run away."

"Run away be—"

Mr. Stone uttered a curse of peculiar malignity, and jerked at his horses' bits while he flogged them savagely with a whip that had a piece of wire twisted into the snapper.

"Run away? I'd like to see them. I'd break their cursed jawbones!" he cried, passionately. "I'll teach them to shy!"

And they dashed on, the horses jerked so savagely that they were dancing over the road, when they heard a shrill, angry scream from a cross-lane that entered the road a little way ahead.

The next moment the colossal form of a huge elephant made its appearance close by, the beast throwing his trunk aloft above a huge pair of tusks, and trumpeting shrilly!

Stone's friend uttered a cry of terror; the horses gave a furious plunge to one side, dragging Stone half out of the buggy; and then, with a squeal of mortal terror, away they went down the road opposite to that from which the elephant had come, full speed, running away to all intents and purposes, despite the utmost efforts of their driver, whose face had paled, and whose best skill was bent to the one purpose of keeping the team straight—if he could.

The horses were fairly mad with fear, and the elephant came trotting after the buggy with huge strides, trumpeting in the same angry tone.

"Oh, my God! Stone, we'll be killed!" cried the fair man, and he clutched the rail of the buggy as if to leap out.

Stone made no reply.

He was too busy hauling at his horses to keep them straight in the road, which described a curve, as he knew, and ended on a railway bridge about a mile off, over a fifty-foot cutting.

Where the elephant had come from, how the brute got there, Stone never heeded. It was there, and his horses were going to take him into destruction, if he missed the narrow bridge.

Awry went the buggy like a flash, and the blonde man was white as a sheet with fear, uttering craven lamentations, till his friend hissed viciously out of the side of his mouth:

"Shut up, you cursed coward! Do you want to scare them worse?"

The blonde was silenced and sat there, clinging to the rail, till at last he ventured to look back up the road.

The elephant was still there, but he saw beside it a crowd of wagons and people, while a single figure on horseback was crossing the fields, leaping fences in the way, cutting across the chord of the curve taken by the road, and trying to get ahead of the buggy.

Then George Leonard turned to look ahead again, and the team had come to the top of a slope, at the bottom of which was the railroad cutting and bridge across it.

The bridge was broad enough for two vehicles to pass, but at the entrance there was no fence to guide a runaway team toward it, and another road led aside so invitingly that it was a toss-up whether the team would not go for the gap and over the edge of the steep cutting.

Stone was livid as he saw his danger, but he managed to say, in broken, jerky sentences, as he tugged at the reins:

"When you can't do anything—else—jump! Curse them! I'll break their necks as—well's my own!"

Leonard was just preparing to jump when a new actor came upon the scene.

A lady on a chestnut horse came flying over the rail fence into the road, and in another moment was galloping by the horses.

"Let go their heads!" she screamed, as they flew along—"let go their heads!"

Stone might not have obeyed, had he not begun to weaken from his intense exertions. He *did* relax his grip.

The lady was already on the side of the gap, galloping on, and he heard her talking to the horses, soothingly, while she patted them encouragingly, not attempting to check them.

She kept on the side of the gap, and as they neared it, with her riding-whip she kept flicking the near horse on the side of the neck to keep him from swerving.

In two moments more they thundered over the bridge, full speed, and came to a steep hill on the other side, up which the now foaming team toiled, at a much slower pace.

"Steady, boys! steady! So, so! Gently, gently! Steady! W'oa!" cried the lady ahead, in clear, girlish tones, as she patted and soothed them, till they slackened to a trot.

Then she turned round on Stone the very

pretty, saucy face of a girl of eighteen, framed in short, curly hair, and called out:

"Now, young fellow, now's your time! Pull them up; they're pretty well tired out!"

Stone immediately gave a savage jerk to both reins, and set his horses to rearing and plunging again, when the girl screamed:

"Not that way, man! You're not fit to have horses! I ought to have let you break your neck, and served you right. Gently, gently! So, so!"

And somehow or other, under her soft voice and gentle touch the mad team came to a standstill, trembling all over, blown, with heaving flanks, covered with foam, and Leonard exclaimed, fervently:

"Thank God! I thought we were gone!"

Stone, on the other hand, looked savage and mortified to the last degree, though he said:

"Madam, I'm much indebted to you, whoever you are; but as for those confounded circus people, I'll—"

The girl interrupted him with a merry laugh, as she held up her whip, saying:

"Take care, young fellow! take care! I belong to that show myself."

Then, as the two young men were too much dumfounded to answer, she went on, with a wave of her hand:

"I'm sorry King Philip frightened your team, and I've done my best to prevent harm; but you ought to have known we were coming. Our bills have been through here for a week. Good-day, gentlemen. Hope you won't suffer any ill consequences from your accident."

She inclined her head slightly, wheeled her horse, which, now it was close by, they saw to be a beautiful, slender, thoroughbred mare, and was just starting off when Stone said, hurriedly:

"Excuse me, miss, but we owe you our lives. If you had not come up when you did, we might have gone over the bank."

She tossed her head slightly.

"Oh, that's nothing. I know the road, and father told me to cut you off. I've no time to stay here. Good-day."

"But at least," cried Stone, "tell me your name, that I may know you again."

She laughed at him in a way that embarrassed the bold sport, who, now that he saw she was exceedingly pretty, had resolved, in his own phrase, to "make a mash for all he was worth."

"My name?" she replied, curling her red lip. "Oh, what are you giving me? If you want to know, come to the show and bring your friends. We want a few diamond-pins in the reserved seats to light up the house."

"I should say your eyes were sufficient for that," returned Stone, instantly.

She laughed outright.

"Well, you're sick, young fellow," she said, frankly. "My eyes won't pay for reserved seats, and your diamonds may—that is, if they're real, of course."

Stone instantly drew his from his bosom and held it out, saying:

"Take it, my love, and keep it in memory of me. I say, what is your name?"

The man thought, from the frank way of the girl, that she was coquetting and willing to talk with him, but when he held out the diamond she colored high, and answered haughtily:

"I'm not your love, sir. Keep your old paste pins for yourself."

Then without another word she wheeled her mare and galloped away across the bridge up the road, down which they had come.

At the end of this road, where it crossed the turnpike, they could now see gathered quite a crowd of vehicles and people, in the midst of which the giant form of the elephant towered.

"It's that circus we saw the bills of, as we passed Popokus," remarked George Leonard, as he pulled out a field-glass from under the carriage seat and took a long survey of the group.

"They're breaking up now and moving on, and the girl's going back to them. I say, Colden, don't she ride pretty, and isn't she a regular witch? I swear I've a mind to go to that show for fun, just to get acquainted with that girl. She's a daisy."

Stone curled his lip slightly as he turned his horses round to walk back.

"Ride? Of course. That's her business. Yes, she's confounded pretty. I guess I *will* go to the show, George. But *you* haven't got a chance."

"Why not?" inquired George, nettled.

"Why not? Because that girl knows the ropes, you bet. Those circus women all do. It's the stamps she's after. Didn't you see her eye glitter when she saw the diamond? I'll get round that girl yet, my boy."

George Leonard flushed slightly as he answered his friend:

"We'll see about that, Colden. I've got a word to say too. She looked at me twice as much as she did at you."

Stone smiled rather contemptuously.

"Go ahead, dear boy. I won't interfere with your little game. But I'll bet you an even thousand I cut you out."

They were a precious pair; George Leonard, the son of a rich mine-owner, who had inherited vast wealth, and had nothing to do but spend it;

and Stone, his mentor in the arts of spending, with wits and audacity for capital.

"Colden A. Stone, Mining Broker," was the title of his business card, but he lived chiefly by the fluctuations in stocks and the follies of the public that attends at horse-races and backs favorites.

And he lived well, judging from his teams and diamonds.

"Ay, ay," he went on, as he walked his foaming horse slowly across the bridge, and looked at the place of their escape, "it wasn't much the girl did, after all. She's riding all the time, and has a good horse. If we *had* gone over, it would have been all their fault, with their brute of an elephant. I'm going to get even with those men for frightening my team. You see if I don't do it, George."

For the saving of his life he had no thanks.

CHAPTER II.

POP HICKS'S SHOW.

THE town of Popokus is celebrated, all over the western part of the State of New York, for its manufactories of harness and saddlery, and for the quantity of people it turns out to see a circus.

Popokus is known as a "good two-day stand for a wagon show" in the business, though it does not pay for the monster concerns that have more than a thousand hands on the pay-roll.

At ordinary times it will send any circus out of its limits with a full treasury, and the factories are forced to suspend business when the shows come into town.

But on the evening after the adventure of Stone and Leonard with the elephant, Popokus was all agog with delight.

Two shows had come to the town at one time, and occupied green lots exactly opposite to each other, where two brass bands discoursed rival melodies, where two stentorian-voiced men stood at the gates roaring the praises of their shows, till even *their* lungs failed, and they were reduced to hoarse whispers; while the populace, in bewilderment as to which show was to be the best, vibrated from one side to the other, and had to be run in by main force and persuasion combined, as the "outside men" got a chance at them.

Stretched along the top of one show was a broad canvas streamer that read:

"POP HICKS, KING OF SHOWMEN."

On the other side was a gigantic face, measuring twenty feet from chin to forehead, with the legend:

"G. BRAGAN BOWNSSE'S SHOW OF ALL SHOWS."

Around these central legends were grouped pictures of horses, lions, tigers, elephants, birds, acrobats and riders, executing marvelous feats, with legends attached; and it was so hard for the simple folk of Popokus to decide which show was the most worthy of patronage, that most of them actually stayed away from both.

It was getting near eight o'clock, the hour for the performance to begin, and still the tents were by no means full, when a stout old man, with a round, merry face and snow-white hair, bustled past the entrance of "Pop Hicks's Show," and said to the hoarse-voiced man outside:

"Whoop 'em up, Billy; whoop 'em up."

The touter replied in a rueful whisper:

"Guv'ner, I'm played. They won't whoop for a cent. Hain't no voice left."

The old man—it was Pop Hicks himself—looked keenly at the crowd in front and over at the rival show.

The touter on the other side had ceased to bel-low, and his arms waved in a frantic manner, while his lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"He's gone too, Billy!" chuckled Pop Hicks, with a grin.

Then as he looked at the people, still hesitating between the shows and filling the open space in a dense crowd, he struck his forehead, and muttered:

"Stoopid—stupid! Why, that's jest the racket to catch 'em. Hold on, Billy; I'll work 'em."

He dashed into the inclosure again, rushed into the tent, crossed the ring at a run, and came tearing into the space behind, where stable and dressing-room are combined.

"Here, boys!" he cried. "Who's ready—who's ready? All of you—I want you!"

The performers were gathered round, with old coats thrown over their tights, and the stablemen were giving the last touches to the harness when he entered.

Tom Fowler, the bareback rider, a little dapper fellow with a waxed mustache, jumped up to answer:

"I'm ready, guv'ner. What's the racket?"

"Get out, the whole caboodle of you," said Pop Hicks excitedly. "You've got five minutes left. Ride like Old Scratch round the tent and whoop up the guys. They don't know where to go, sir—don't know, by gosh! Whoop 'em up, boys, whoop 'em up! Show Bownsse a trick in show business. That's it, my boys. Old Pop's hard to beat."

And in fact the quick-witted men and women

of the show took the hint at once, and turned out in marvelously short order.

Old Pop Hicks did not wait to see the effect of his little stratagem. For he had to play the clown in his own show and had not yet dressed.

He heard a great shouting and cheering outside, as the brilliantly-dressed circus performers rode out and circled the tent at a gallop, executing a few simple feats to attract the crowd, and muttered to himself.

"I knowed it—I knowed it. Fetch 'em in, boys. That's your sort."

Then came the thundering of feet on the planks in the tent, that told how the crowd had begun to pour in; and the old man went on with his hurried toilet, as the rest of his people came riding in at the back door, laughing to each other.

"How did ye do it—how did ye do it?" cried Pop Hicks, in his big base voice, as he kicked off his trowsers and showed himself in his clown's tights. "What did ye say?"

"Told 'em the racket was going to begin, and dashed in; that's all," replied Tom Fowler, laughing. "Gave 'em a free stand on the old mare's back, and rode in jest as they thought I was going to jump."

Pop Hicks ran to his dressing-table to put on his clown wig, and talked all the while he was adjusting it, and laying on the streaks of red and white on his jolly face.

"Where's Rabbetts? Tell him to whoop up the band, and start the entry going. We've got 'em now, boys."

[Dab, dab of the puff over his face, till he was white all over like a corpse.]

"Where's that band? Confound 'em! why don't they earn their money and play?"

Then, as the thundering of feet outside continued, he picked up the rouge-pot and made a circular dab on each cheek, freshened the end of his nose, and continued the line of his lips till he seemed to be grinning from ear to ear, and his toilet was complete.

The moment he heard the band in the tent, and saw the men and women on horseback filing out of the stables for the "opening cavalcade," his nervous manner ceased, and he smiled to himself as he muttered:

"There—there, 'tain't my fault if she don't go right. I've done all I can, and I can't do more. Pop Hicks is hard to beat."

And so saying, with the showman's resignation to good or bad luck which he cannot explain to himself, he went to the entrance of the stables to look into the ring, not expecting much, and saw that the tent was packed with people, who were still settling into their seats, with more pouring in.

The old showman's smile expanded as he looked, almost to the dimensions of that painted on his cheek, and he turned to a big raw-boned man, dressed in green velvet and gold lace, to say:

"Well, Jim, well? We got 'em that time, hey?"

Jim Perkins was the sole owner and performer of the elephant, King Philip, which had caused such a commotion that day—a very tall, brawny fellow, with a dark, stern-looking face. He cast a glance over the crowd and answered indifferently:

"Hem! Pretty well. If they wouldn't come for King Philip nothing would fetch 'em. It don't look well for us to be bucking ag'in' Bownse a hull season. One of us has to go under, and he's got a bigger pile nor you to back him, Hicks."

Old Pop Hicks bit his lips with an air of vexation. He was an old-fashioned showman, who liked to be on friendly terms with all his people, and "Elephant Jim Perkins" was the first man he had been unable to get along with pleasantly.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Perkins," he said, rather stiffly. "I never went back on my engagements yet, and I've got a better show than he has, or the guys wouldn't come in as they do."

Elephant Jim curled his lip.

"The season ain't over yet, and the only sure thing in circus biz is—Saturday night and settlin' up."

Pop Hicks turned round on him sharply.

"Have I ever failed you, Saturday night?"

"Don't say ye have, but ef things goes on this way Bownse is goin' to hurt us," replied Perkins, dogmatically. "You know that, Pop, don't you?"

Pop looked his grumbling follower in the eye as he answered steadily:

"If he does, it's my loss, not yours, Jim. I'm running this show, and if Bownse chooses to buck against me, it's my lookout and not yours. All I want of you is to do your act and keep your brute from frightening the guys. I'm more afraid of that than I am of Bownse."

Perkins was about to answer when a drapper little gentleman, with a bald head, huge dark mustache and velvet coat came out of a dressing-room, drawing the lash of a long whip through his hand, and approached Pop with the bland remark, in the deepest of base voices to come from so small a man:

"Good-evening, Mr. Hicks."

He had a way of saying the most common-

place things in an oratorical manner, mouthing his words so as to impress people with the belief that he was a person of great wisdom, and he officiated as ring-master in the show.

Pop Hicks at once became jolly again and executed a profound reverence, saying:

"Pro-fessor, your most obedient, and how does your ponderosity sagaciate to-night, sir?"

He was so used to talking nonsense in the ring as clown that he did it behind the scenes whenever he saw his confederate, Professor Rabbetts, the ring-master.

"Pretty well, thank you, sir," returned the Professor, with funereal gravity; "pretty well—yes, pretty well—pretty well—pretty well."

"Does it run champagne?" inquired Pop, anxiously. "Does it, Professor?"

"Does what run champagne, sir? Does what run champagne? What do you mean, sir? What should run champagne, sir?"

Professor Rabbetts asked these questions slowly and pompously in the style he used in the ring, which had become from long habit second nature with him.

"Does what run champagne, sir?"

"That pretty well you spoke of. By gosh! if it does, it's a splendid well," returned the old clown, with an oily chuckle at his own poor joke, and so great was the force of habit that Professor Rabbetts immediately cracked his whip and announced:

"Ma'm'selle Celestine, in her unparalleled manege act."

"It's not time," called out a voice from a dressing-room near by. "I don't go on till after Tom Fowler."

A pretty, saucy face was poked out from between the curtains, framed in short curls of the very lightest flaxen; a face with a little turn-up nose and very dark-blue eyes, a perpetual curl to the red lips, as if the owner were laughing at something.

"What are you calling on me for?" she asked. "It's not my turn."

"Absence of mind, Miss Sally, absence of mind," returned Rabbetts, with a flourish, "absence of mind, I assure you—yes, yes, absence of mind, Miss Sally."

"Are you sure you've got any to be absent?" asked the girl, saucily.

Rabbetts gave a snort.

"Ha! ha! very good, very good—ha! ha—good, very good—very good—Miss Sally—and to be absent—good—ha! ha!"

"Oh, give us a rest with your very good," the girl returned, as saucily as before. "You make my head ache when you hear a good thing, Rabbetts."

Then to Hicks:

"Say, pa, how's the house?"

"Very good, Sally, splendid," returned Pop Hicks, smiling all over. "Hurry up, child. Here come the people in, and Perkins goes on next. Don't make a wait."

Sally Hicks made a face at her parent.

"Did I ever make a wait yet?" she asked. "Wish you could say the same for all your people. Ta-ta. I'm nearly ready."

Then she vanished, and the rustling and giggling in the ladies' dressing-room showed that people were dressing in a hurry in there, while, outside, the opening cavalcade came tearing into the stables.

Then Professor Rabbetts, with his usual stately stride (albeit his legs were of the shortest), marched into the ring, to be followed by Pop Hicks a moment later, turning a clumsy somerset and coming up smiling, to roar, with the lungs of an old clown the ancient gag:

"Well, Professor, and how does your ponderosity sagaciate on this bright and beautiful, not to say splendiferous evening, sir? How's that for high? Aha?"

The usual interchange of venerable witticisms followed; Pop Hicks doing his best, inspired by the large audience around him, till the time came for the introduction of King Philip, the great elephant.

Then they backed aside, and the old manager had a chance to inspect the reserved seats more closely, being unnoticed as the elephant came lumbering in.

On the front row were several gorgeously-attired gentlemen, with diamonds on, and each held a large and expensive bouquet of flowers in his hand.

CHAPTER III.

THE RIOTOUS DUDES.

THE old manager was not surprised at the sight of so many sports, for he knew that his pretty daughter, who rode her chestnut mare, Flirt, in the manege act, had been a favorite in all the towns they had passed through, and

* A lady for whose opinions I entertain the highest respect, and of whose broomstick I stand in awe, objects to the exchange of witticisms between the ring-master and clown in this chapter, that it is, in her picturesque phrase, "old as the hills." To be true to nature it *had to be so*. If any of my readers can discover a circus clown who has invented a new joke since the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, he can make a fortune—for the clown—by publishing the lucky man's full name with the joke appended.—AUTHOR.

more than one rich man had come dangling after her.

He only grinned, and muttered to himself:

"Lord, what fools some folks are! But it's all good for the business."

Then the great elephant came in with Jim Perkins, gorgeous in green velvet and gold lace, and executed its usual feats, throwing up its master from the end of its tusks in a somerset to its head, kneeling and firing guns at command, till it finally lumbered out of the ring.

As it went, Pop noticed that Perkins had to prod it severely several times, and that the beast uttered an angry cry; but he thought nothing of it till he heard one of the sports behind him say, audibly:

"That brute's not safe to have in a show. Some day there will be a bad accident. He nearly killed me this morning; it ought to be put in the papers."

The words disturbed the manager more than he cared to show.

As a matter of fact, King Philip was an ill-tempered beast, who was kept in order by excessive severity; but Pop Hicks had no fears about an accident.

What he *did* fear was that the disposition of the elephant might be exaggerated in the papers and frighten away people.

And the man who spoke was sitting next to a youth with a note-book, who opened a whispered conversation with him instantaneously.

Pop Hicks had all a manager's fears of a newspaper, and he immediately sidled off to the entrance of the stables, and called out, *sotto voce*:

"Send Mr. Moone here at once, when I come off."

Then he dashed on again, and was more funny than ever during the pad-riding act of Ma'm'selle Hippolyte, who made her appearance in all the glory of short skirts, and leaped through the hoops in the approved style.

He kept a sharp lookout on the little reporter and the sports during the act, and as soon as it was over went to the stable entrance, where he found a little, weary-looking man, shabbily dressed, to whom he said, rapidly:

"You're not attending to your business. There's a fellow queering* our show to a reporter about King Philip and the runaway team to-day. You'll see him. Black mustache—diamonds. Go and put the newspaper guy straight."

Mr. Moone nodded and slipped off among the men of the audience till he got to the reporter, when Pop Hicks smiled with satisfaction to see him take his seat by the diamond-studded gentlemen and enter into conversation with them.

"Good boy, Moone," he muttered, as he went on again. "He'll put the guy straight."

Then came Mr. Tom Fowler, who went through his bareback act amid great applause, but Pop Hicks noticed that the sports in the front row paid little attention to him, and frequently laughed to each other, as if sneering.

When the bareback act was over, Pop Hicks felt his heart beat in spite of himself, old showman that he was.

His daughter was the next to perform, and he could not get over the little flutter of anxiety that her appearance always caused him, confident as he was of her success.

In fact, Sally Hicks, little slender girl that she was, hardly weighing a hundred pounds, executed one of the most difficult and perilous feats in the whole show at the close of her manege act, when she leaped four hurdles in close succession, and concluded by a flying leap over a twelve-foot banner. If her horse was not fresh and vigorous, it was very apt to fall over one of the hurdles, and in that case a bad accident was very likely to happen. And Flirt had had a hard ride that very morning over high fences, to save the buggy from going over the bank.

The old man made his jokes as usual, till the time came to retire, when he ran to the stable entrance, to find his daughter there, saucy as ever, on the mare, waiting for the bell to send her out.

"How's Flirt?" he asked, anxiously. "Can she go through, Sally? If you're afraid, say the word, and we'll drop the last leap."

Sally laughed and shook her head.

"Flirt's all right, pa. Don't you be afraid. How are the guys?"

"Packed close, Sally, like sardines. There's a lot of mashers in diamonds, with bokays, in one place. Look out fur 'em. They may skeer Flirt."

"All right, pa. I'll know what to do."

Then came the "ting" of the bell, and the Professor announced in base tones:

"Ma'm'selle Celestine, in her unparalleled and daring manege act! Ma'm'selle Celestine!"

Then came a roar of applause as the chestnut mare dashed out, with her trim little rider in a plain brown habit and high black hat, and circled the ring at a slow canter, the girl bowing in answer to the applause.

Little Sally Hicks, under her ring name of

* "Queering" a show is running it down. A "queer" show is a poor one.

Mlle. Celestine, was the great attraction of Pop Hicks's show; his sure card.

She understood the art of the manege to perfection, and understood, too, the art of concealing the means she used to produce her effects, equally well.

She moved her hands but little, and then almost imperceptibly, had her riding-whip of the same color as her mare's hide, and kept it down, so as to be very nearly invisible.

When Flirt stood still in the arena and pawed the air with one forefoot in time to the music, then changed to the other, and finally alternated between the two, people thought the horse had been taught by music; and no one recognized the little pats of whip and spur, the little tugs of one rein and the other, by which first one foot, then the other, was made to do its duty.

When Flirt trotted round the ring in the peculiar airy gait known as the "piaffer," few knew that her rider, with rein, whip and spur, regulated the length of every pace, while she sat in the saddle apparently unmoved.

The most difficult part of the performance was, in fact, that which excited least applause; and it was reserved for the showy leaping finish to call forth the hearty clappings of the crowd.

The manege act was successfully executed, and the men were running in to set the hurdles for the leap.

Sally sat on her horse at one side of the ring, waiting for the set, when, as if by one motion, the row of men whom Pop had told her of as the "mashers," stood up together; and the leader, who was Mr. Stone, in a loud voice, observed:

"Ahem! Ahem!"

Sally turned her head and saw them all on their feet, extending their bouquets to her, when Stone, in a voice that would not have shamed Professor Rabbetts, cried out theatrically:

"Beautiful Celestine, accept these flowers from me, as a token of profound admiration and undying affection."

Sally looked at him sharply and saw little Moone, the agent, beside him. She thought that it was a stroke of business, so bowed and took the bouquet, amid much applause, when the other men declaimed in chorus like college boys as they held up their bouquets:

"Beautiful—Celestine—accept—these—flowers—from—us—too—too—too."

Then she colored and laughed rather angrily, as she said to Moone:

"Take them to my dressing-room. How can I hold them all? You must be sick Moone."

Then she started her horse, bouquet and all, at the hurdles, and went over them with much applause.

The men with the bouquets sat down while she made the first round, but on the second they all rose up again, waving the flowers. Flirt started and shied; knocked down a hurdle, and the next moment stood on her hind legs and began to waltz round, while Sally cried to the men in the ring:

"Take them away. It's those sick dudes. They've spoiled my act."

The men ran away with the hurdles, the mare came down, and the rider brought her to the stable door, calling out to the attendants:

"Bring the banner! I'll finish."

The huge banner, twelve feet broad, was hurried in; the girl backed her mare to clear it, and was just starting, when the body of "mashers," who had refused to give up their bouquets to Moone to be carried in, jumped up again and began to declaim their chorus.

"Beautiful Celestine," etc.

This time Flirt shied more violently than before, and reared up, while the girl cried passionately:

"Put them out! They're doing it on purpose to spoil the act."

Her words were heard, and in a moment a rush of the circus men was made to the spot where the disturbers were placed.

Old Pop Hicks kept cool, however, and said as he took his stand:

"Sit down, gentlemen. You're scaring the horse. Sit down."

"Sit down be hanged!" answered Stone, in a bullying tone. "Don't you know how to treat gentlemen when they come to your show? The girl insulted my friends. She wouldn't take the flowers."

"I'll take them and see she gets them," Pop Hicks answered firmly. "You can't interrupt the performance, sir. Other people have rights as well as you."

He saw that the whole party had been drinking heavily, Stone and Leonard worse than the rest; and the people in the show were beginning to get up out of their seats and buzz, while a panic was imminent.

He took his decision in a moment, and said hurriedly to his men:

"Hold them if they fight. I'll speak."

Then he rushed to the center of the ring and roared:

"Ladies and gentlemen—don't be alarmed—only a mistake—these gentlemen want to give Celestine some flowers, and they've scared the

horse. Please sit down. It will be over in a minute."

His voice calmed the excited people, of whom many were women and children, and they settled into silence, when he went back to the obnoxious dudes and said sternly:

"Now, if you want to give those flowers, give them. If you want to make a disturbance, you can have it. Which is it?"

Leonard, who was pot-valiant, instantly threw his bouquet down, crying:

"To blazes with you and your circus girls. Come along, boys. Let's get out and go to the other show, where they know how to treat a gentleman properly."

"Best thing you can do," retorted Pop Hicks sharply. "Your kind are no good in a decent show."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Stone uttered a savage curse and put his hand to his hip pocket, an action imitated by his friends.

Before a weapon could be drawn, the active, powerful circus men were on them, and had them clinched.

In three seconds more they were hauled out of their seats and dragged to the door, while Pop Hicks, in the middle of the ring, cried:

"Keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen. Only a little too much whisky aboard; that's all. No danger!"

He signaled to the band and it struck up a lively air instantly. Before the air was finished the excitement was over; the men brought out the banner; and little Sally made her leap amid such thunders of applause that it was evident the audience sympathized with the show in the dispute.

They shouted and stamped till she rode out again to bow her thanks; but when it was all over, and the tumblers were in the ring, Pop Hicks said to his factotum, Moone:

"We'll have to fix the newspaper guys. I'm afraid those men are going to make trouble with us. They looked rich. Who are they?"

The agent told him, with a grave face, that Leonard was the richest man in town, and owner of a paper. Then Pop Hicks bit his lip anxiously, but said:

"I couldn't help it. I'm not going to have my Sally insulted by those mashers. It can't hurt us much. We go out to-night."

At that moment the show closed, and the audience began to disperse.

Pop was changing his clown's dress for the costume of ordinary life, and the thunder of feet on the planks was incessant, when little Tom Fowler, who had been outside in his street dress, ran in, crying:

"Where's Pop? Where is he?"

Pop called out:

"Here, Tommy; what is it?"

Tom came close to him, to say in a low tone:

"Those dudes are outside with a gang. They're going to make a raid. The money wagon's safe, but we're going to catch it."

Pop said nothing till he had finished his dressing. By that time the noise of the departing audience had ceased, but a buzzing told that the crowd remained before the tent.

Old Pop Hicks picked up a club and went outside, to be greeted by a volley of brickbats and the rush of a gang of men in anger.

At that moment some one in the rear of the circus men yelled:

"HEY, RUBE! ! !"

It was the showman's battle-cry, which means business every time. The fight had begun in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

HEY, RUBE!

POP HICKS knew, when he heard that cry, that it was a battle to the death, and so did every man in the show, from Tom Fowler, the high-salaried rider, to the humblest canvas-man in the party.

The lights in the other show were out, and a crowd of men were standing in front of it, looking on at the riot, while at least fifty rough-looking men, with clubs and stones, were assaulting the Hicks party as fast as they came out.

But the cry, "Hey, Rube!" altered the attitude of every one.

The Hicks men rushed together in a compact body, armed with tent-pins, iron bars from the cage-shutters, pitchforks and shovels from the stables, and lengths of chain from the railings inside, which they knew how to wield.

"Hey, Rube!" they yelled in chorus, and made a ferocious charge on their foes, striking, stabbing, cutting, with a force and skill that came of their long training.

They scattered the gang in front of them like chaff, and were chasing them out of the ground when they heard the cracking of pistols close by, and another body of men set on them in the rear.

"Hey, Rube!" shrieked Tom Fowler, as the little man, who was all muscle and sinew, dashed at his new assailants, and Pop Hicks followed, wielding a big club, with which he downed a man at every stroke.

Then came more of the Popokus men to the assistance of their townsmen, and in the midst

of the riot and darkness the shrieks of women became audible in the tent they had just left.

The lady riders in the show, appalled at the noise outside, had shrunk into their dressing-room and had tried to get out of the tent by the back way, when they were met by Stone and Leonard, with their crowd of half-drunken sports, who ran at them, crying:

"Fair game, boys! Each take one!"

There, in the darkness and confusion, the brutes ran and clutched at the women, who began to shriek wildly for help, while they fought so fiercely, (for they were all strong, wiry creatures,) scratching and screaming, that their capturers were glad to release them, all but Stone, who had caught hold of little Sally in his arms, crying:

"Now, my saucy beauty, I must have one kiss, positively."

The plucky little girl screamed and fought desperately, but Stone was a heavy-weight and heeded her struggles no more than if she had been a child, and the confusion waxed ten-fold worse, when Sally with her utmost strength shrieked:

"Hey, Rube!!! Hey, Rube!!!"

Stone laughed aloud, answering:

"Rube won't come, my beauty! I've got you!"

The clamor on the other side of the tent grew fiercer, and it seemed as if help were an impossibility, when an answering cry came to the girl's ear.

"Hey, Rube!!!"

With it was the trampling of feet, and round the corner of the tent came a dark figure, echoing the cry.

In another moment the dark figure was on them, darting from side to side with the rapidity and force of some ferocious wild beast.

Not a sound came from it, but at every blow it struck, down went a dude and lay still.

Stone saw it coming and started to meet it, proud of his own proficiency as a bruiser, shouting:

"Sock it to him, gentlemen! Only one man! give him blazes!"

The next moment he saw the dark figure leap up in the air and two hard heels were dashed in his face, sending him to earth senseless as a log.

The stranger dashed at another and dealt him a blow behind the ear which settled him and scared George Leonard so that he ran away as hard as he could go, yelling for help.

Then they heard the row on the other side the tent wax fiercer, and the stranger, who had come so opportunely to the help of the women, said hurriedly:

"Now, ladies, run while you can. I'll keep the guys off."

Ma'm'selle Hippolyte at once began to cry, now the danger was over. Her real name was Bridget Stubbs, but Hippolyte sounded better in the ring.

"Oh," she cried, "I'm frightened to death. Who are you? Won't you see us home?"

"I'm Charley Noble," said the stranger, in a hurried, anxious way, looking back. "I do the lions in the other show. For God's sake, skip, ladies. There's no time to lose. Go out, straight ahead. You'll see Main street lights on the other side. I must go and help the boys."

But Ma'm'selle Hippolyte had caught him by the arm, protesting:

"Oh, I shall die if you leave us."

"Then die, you donkey! You've no more grit than a calf," cried Sally Hicks, running to her and pulling her off. "Come along with me and let this gentleman go. We are very much obliged to you, sir. Good-by."

So saying she dragged off Bridget Stubbs, while Noble hastily answered:

"Thank you, thank you. I'd like to see you home, ladies, but—"

"But get back and knock the spots out of 'em," cried Sally, spiritedly. "We don't need you. Hark! they're yelling again!"

In fact the yell of "Hey, Rube!!!" arose at that moment louder than ever, as if it came from a hundred throats, and Noble darted off, uttering the same cry and disappeared.

"Now, girls," cried plucky little Sally, "this way to the hotel. They're all busy."

So saying she set off across the green lot, where all was dark and lonely, to a gap in the fence, where they had come in that evening from the hotel, and, in a short half-hour later, were safe in their parlor, awaiting the result of the battle.

How long it lasted they could not tell, but they evinced no anxiety about it, now that they were out of personal danger.

The life of a circus performer is so made up of accidents, sprains, bruises and broken limbs, that a fight is a mere incident among others. Even the women get used to it and think little of it as long as no one is killed.

They waited patiently for nearly an hour; and then came a knock at the door of the ladies' parlor, and little Moone came in, quiet and weary as usual, to say to them, with his old stereotyped smile, that meant nothing:

"Well, ladies, the baggage is packed and we're ready to move whenever you are."

Sally Hicks rushed at him instantly.

"Now, look here, Moone," she said, lifting her finger threateningly, "you tell me the truth, or it will be the worse for you."

Moone looked at her placidly.

"What's the matter with you?" was all he deigned to answer.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with me," she answered in her impetuous way. "You set those dudes on to queer my act, didn't you, you little sinner?"

"Did I?" returned Moone calmly. "Well, then, complain to the old man. You know I didn't; so what's the use of talking? Are you ready to go yet?"

"No. Is any one hurt?" asked she, with her usual way of skipping from one thing to another.

Moone nodded.

"Yes, several. Tom Fowler got a black eye, that'll last him a month."

"That's nothing. Any bones broken?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Tim Flanagan, the canvas-man. Had his arm broken. Got to leave him in the hospital."

"How did it end, and where were you?"

"It ended in our cleaning them out, and I got the men in the other show to help us."

"Didn't they do it till you asked 'em?" Sally snapped out angrily.

Moone shook his head.

"Not a man stirred, except one."

"And who was that?"

"Charley Noble, their beast man. He broke away when he heard you girls yelping. What was it, anyway?"

Sally tossed her head angrily.

"What's that to you? You weren't with us to help us. Pretty agent you are!"

Moone smiled placidly.

"I wasn't engaged to fight. Besides, I'm no better at it than you—not so good, perhaps. What was the racket, girls?"

He was on familiar terms with them all, and they rather liked him, because he never talked any nonsense to them.

Bridget Stubbs broke out:

"It was those dudes that frightened Flirt. They came after us. But didn't that man lay 'em out, just?"

Moone laughed.

"He ought to. He's the wickedest fighter I ever saw. Better than Elephant Jim, and he's a terror, you know."

"Was Jim hurt?" inquired one of the girls who rode in the "entry."

"Hurt? Well, not much. He got several clips, but he's tough. He well-nigh killed one of the townies, though, and we had to send him on ahead in a buggy, for fear they might arrest him for spite. King Philip went with him, and I pity the man that tries to arrest him."

The girls laughed at the idea, too, for King Philip was the terror of the show, when his trainer was not with him all the while.

"Come along, girls," added the little agent. "We're well out of this town, if they don't follow us into the next, and make it hot for us there."

Sally Hicks laughed defiantly.

"If these sick dudes come after me again, with their flowers and nonsense, I'll let them have a piece of my mind," she said.

Moone shook his head.

"Won't do, Sally. Showmen can't afford to have rows. Your father feels anxious about the next town. You do your act, and leave us to attend to the dudes. They don't get in again to make a disturbance."

They went down-stairs, where the girls found waiting, the large, comfortable vans in which they traveled from place to place.

Pop Hicks's show was one of the old-fashioned kind that does not depend on railroads for transportation, but carries everything from town to town in vans; that moves like a brigade of troops with its train of baggage, and lives in tents during the whole season, only using hotels for feeding-places.

Sally and Ma'm'selle Hippolyte, with Zoralina, the trapeze girl, and Fanny Rounder, the hurdle-act lady, occupied one of the huge vans and slept there on the road, when the only people left awake were the drivers, who kept on the watch all night.

Zoralina was a quiet, modest girl—real name Amelia Briggs—the last person one would have thought of as the brilliant figure in tights that was wont to vibrate in mid-air before the crowd.

As the girls prepared to sleep, she said to Sally in a whisper:

"Sally, dear."

"Well, Milly?"

"We're going to have trouble ahead."

"I know it, Milly."

"And it's going to keep up the whole season."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I know the light man that made the first fight about you."

"Who is he?"

"He is a rich man, and he owns mines in the very country we're going to."

"What of that?"

Zoralina shuddered.

"You don't know those miners. If he tells them, they'll drive us out of every town we come to."

Sally compressed her red lips.

"They can try it; but I tell you, Milly, they don't know my father. He's hard to beat."

She looked herself, at the moment, a good deal like her father in the face, with the same determined expression.

"They can run us out if they get the whole people on their side," pursued Sally, who knew a good deal of the inside business of the show, from hearing her father talk; "but I can tell you one thing; they haven't got all the papers, and they can't get them while little Moone manages the racket. He'll bring it all right, see if he don't."

"Mr. Moone's a good man," assented Zoralina, rather faintly; "but what's he going to do if they make a fight at every place?"

"I'll tell you," returned Sally viciously. "We can make it as hot for them as they can for us. Oh, I wish I was a man for just this season. I'd give it to them. Wouldn't I just, when they cry 'Hey, Rube?' I tell you what it is, Zoe, fighting's fun, if you can only whip your man."

CHAPTER V.

PAYING THE PIPER.

MR. COLDEN A. STONE, his head bound up in a white linen bandage, stained with blood; one of his handsome dark eyes closed with a huge swelling; his nose broken; with a cut on his lip that nearly split it, lay on a sofa in the house of his friend, Leonard, with the surgeon putting his nose into shape.

He cursed and snuffled, groaned and swore at the doctor fussed at him; while his friend sat at a well-spread breakfast-table by him, fresh and uninjured, and interjected advice to him when he groaned.

"Take it coolly, man. You don't want to be disfigured for life. Doctor's doing all he can for you. Don't make such a noise."

Stone pushed away the doctor's hand and made the room ring with his curses and the noise of his snuffling, as he reviled his friend till the air was blue with profanity.

Then he sunk back, saying:

"Go on, doctor. I'm easier now."

Leonard was used to his ways, and kept on at his breakfast, with a smile of great content on his pale, handsome face; for he saw that his friend was disfigured for a long time to come, and Stone was the only man George Leonard feared as a rival in the affections of the opposite sex.

The doctor at last got through with Stone's nose, which he had manipulated into shape, and rose, saying:

"There, sir. If you can keep perfectly quiet for about two days, those bones will heal without much disfigurement, but you must avoid excitement, stop drinking as much as you can, also smoking; lie still on the sofa and think of nothing but how to nurse your wounds. It will be three weeks before the marks are gone, but the nose will be safe in two days."

Stone scowled ill-temperedly.

"What'm I do 'muse 'self?" he snuffled, for he could not speak plain for the strips of plaster that ornamented his nose.

"What must you do to amuse yourself? Read, write, do anything but talk, and get into a passion. If you move your face much the muscles will draw those strips loose, and we shall have to do it all over again. You understand?"

Stone nodded sullenly.

"I stand," he snuffled. "Cuss luck."

The doctor laughed.

"Curse the luck as much as you like. How did you get into such a row, Mr. Leonard? Was it that fight with the circus men that they are all talking about to-day?"

Leonard nodded his head.

"Yes. It was a sudden thing. I don't exactly know how it began, but the men attacked us savagely and we had to do our best. They had clubs, and one of them struck poor Stone—"

The doctor interrupted.

"Club? No, no, you must be mistaken. Where did he hit him? I saw no wound. Perhaps I didn't examine—is it on the back of the head?"

And he was coming over to examine his patient, when Stone snuffled angrily:

"S'lie, s'lie. No club—heel—heel—cuss luck."

The doctor looked at his face narrowly.

"That accounts for it. I was wondering what that mark meant in its crescent shape. It was a kick, was it?"

Leonard colored slightly.

"To tell you the truth I was not sure, and I thought it was a club, from the marks."

"Yes," hissed Stone, malignantly, "'n' you ran, you ran!"

Leonard shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course I ran. I didn't want to have my face ruined after I saw you knocked stiff. What do you say, Doc?"

The doctor looked at Stone's battered face in a curious way.

"I think that the less you have to do with men who kick like that, the better," he said, dryly. "It's as bad as a horse could have done with his hoofs."

Leonard looked coolly at his friend.

"Yes, it's pretty bad," he said, "pretty bad. He won't have much chance to make a mash, for some time—hey, doctor?"

The doctor evaded the question by turning to go away; but Stone glared at his friend with such passion that the medical man raised his hand warningly to say:

"Careful, careful. Don't let him tease you; or disfigurement is sure. He don't mean any harm. Good-day. Remember what I said about excitement."

Then he was gone, and Stone lay on the sofa, glaring savagely at his friend, while Leonard chipped an egg, and said airily:

"It's no use scowling over it, old fellow. By Jove, you can't say I've not treated you well all this time. I couldn't afford to lose all my good looks for you, you know. I've helped you all I can, now."

And indeed he had; for Stone had been an inmate of his house for two years, during which he had fleeced his host at poker to the tune of thousands of dollars; smoked his cigars; drank his wines, and made himself generally as much at home as if the house belonged to him, which it did by virtue of possession and enjoyment, as much as a house could to any man.

Stone knew this, and saw something in the manner of his dupe that made him think to himself that if Leonard chose to cut his acquaintance, he, Stone, would be likely to be the loser.

It was this feeling and his physical soreness and prostration that caused him to put a curb on his devilish temper for the first time in their long acquaintance, as he snuffled out sadly:

"Know it, George, know it—I'm sick—'scuse—can't help it."

And George was instantly melted, for he answered cordially:

"I know it, old fellow, and it's a beastly shame for me to tease you."

In common with most of his class—the modern American dude—he affected the ultra English slang and dress, though the flashy instincts of his nature would come out in the diamond pins and sleeve-buttons that he wore, in imitation of his gambling and now battered friend, Stone.

"I ought not to chaff you, Stone," he pursued; "but, after all, I'm afraid it was our own fault. I don't remember much myself; I was too drunk. Didn't we get put out of the show?"

Stone nodded gloomily.

"I thought so, but I wasn't sure. What was it all about?"

Stone knew well enough, for he never drank so much that he lost his recollection, like his weaker friend. It did not happen to suit his purpose, however, to pretend to know just at that time; so he half-closed his eyes, and snuffled:

"I d'no. Wasn't sober. Ask Charley."

Charley was another of Leonard's friends and hangers on; not such a vicious and greedy parasite as Stone, for he still had some money of his own, but on the fair way to ruin with the rest of the party of dudes. His full name was Charles Southworth, commonly called "South," or "Charley."

"Charley, indeed!" returned Leonard, with disdain. "He was as bad as any of us; or, he'd be up now. Here!"

He touched the hand-bell, which was instantly answered by a quiet dandy, who moved like a cat and had a way of coming in after a ring that strongly suggested listening at doors.

"Is Mr. Southworth up?" asked the master of the house.

"Yes, sah," was the reply, and John Johnson never said a word more than was absolutely necessary.

"Is he coming to breakfast?"

"I'll see, sah, if you wish."

Leonard nodded, and John went out, his master saying, as he vanished:

"John's a splendid man; best servant I ever saw. He can do anything."

Stone curled his lip slightly, a motion which he checked instantly from the spasm of pain it caused. He and John Johnson were, in fact, a pair of confederates, assisting to fleece the rich young spendthrift and dividing profits *pro rata*.

He made no remark however, partly on account of the pain it caused him to speak and partly because it was not his cue to speak, till the door opened and into the room came a tall, thin young man with a long, sweeping brown mustache, and the air of a genteel gambler. He looked pale, and had dark circles under his eyes, so that Leonard said, jokingly:

"Hillo, South; laid out again? I thought you were the soberest man of the crowd, last night."

South nodded ruefully.

"So I was, worse luck. I remember it all this morning, and that's more than some do, I'll bet."

"You're right, dear boy," returned his friend, smiling. "Stone and I were trying to remember how the row began, and we can't. Agreed to leave it to you."

South cast a keen glance at Stone.

He was a rival of that gentleman, being in the same boat, and he hated him cordially,

though he feared him as a smarter rascal than himself.

"If Stone can't remember," he said, "I don't see how you can expect me to do it. He has the strongest head of the party."

"Yes, but you don't drink as much," said Leonard soothingly. "You were bilious, you know, and couldn't."

"So much the worse for me," retorted South. "I was as sick as a dog all night, and sha'n't get over it for a week."

"Well then, tell us, South, how the row began," said Leonard. "I remember a fight, and getting put out of a show, but what it was all about I don't know."

South looked at Stone, and a malignant smile curled his lip as he said:

"It was all that smart gentleman, yonder. He must needs insult one of the circus women, and then there was a fight, of course. I couldn't blame them."

"But what did he do?"

"Oh, not much. Only gave the girl that leaped the hurdles some flowers. But that wasn't it. He set the whole lot of us to chaffing her in chorus, and waving bouquets, so it scared the horse and spoiled the girl's act. Then you wanted to draw a pistol, or he did—I forget which—and they just bounced us. Served us right, I say."

Leonard contemplatively shook the grounds in his coffee-cup to make them whirl round, and observed:

"By Jove! Did I want to draw a pistol? I must have been confounded drunk. I don't remember it!"

South looked over at Stone, who had turned his face away, and lay sullenly listening.

"You weren't the only one," he said. "We all went for our pistol-pockets, and I'm not sure it wasn't lucky we got bounced before we had a chance to shoot."

"Why?" asked Leonard.

"Because those circus men fight like Old Scratch, and if we'd wounded one of them, it's my opinion we might not have got off with a few black eyes and bloody noses."

Here Stone turned his head round and glared at South, while he muttered between his teeth a volume of imprecations that showed how angry he was at the allusion to his own disfigurement by another man who had escaped damage.

When he had calmed his passion a little by this, he managed to say, with some difficulty and sniffing on account of his injured nose:

"We got the worst of it last night; but I tell you this, George and South, if you think I'm going to let it end here, you're wrong."

"Why, what are you going to do?" asked Leonard in some surprise.

Stone brought down his fist on the table with a force that made the teacups dance, as he snuffed and hissed out:

"Break up show, cuss 'em! cuss 'em! Break up cussed show! Hear? You!—bah!—do'no' nothing. Phew!—ass!—fool—let girl fool ye—I'll show them!"

His eye glared in the midst of its dark swelling, and his countenance grew fairly purple with rage, so that Leonard, over whom he had acquired so much ascendancy, uneasily inquired:

"What's the matter, Colden? How can we break up the show? What good would it do us?"

The question restored Stone to his calmness at once, for it showed him his friend was biting at the bait he had thrown out.

"You can break up the show," he said, in slower and plainer tones. "You can get that girl if you like. I won't interfere. I'll help you. I want revenge. Give me that, and you can have the girl. She's pretty as a picture."

He noted with satisfaction the start and sudden look of interest of Leonard.

"I'll think of it," said the spendthrift.

CHAPTER VI.

A PRETTY PLOT.

THE fish nibbled at the bait and Stone saw it, when Leonard said hesitatingly:

"I'll think of it."

The superior rascal said no more at the time, but threw himself back on the sofa with an impatient groan of pain, to excite Leonard's sympathy, while South, with a cold indifference to Stone's sufferings that displeased his host, sat down to breakfast.

It is true, Leonard had shown the same himself, a little while before; but the behavior looked worse in another man, and he soon left the table and began to smoke by the window, looking out and declining South's overtures to talk.

The second-class rascal saw that his provider was vexed, and attributed it to mortification at his own behavior the previous night.

Very soon, therefore, he finished his pretense of breakfast—it was a mere pretense, for the man was bilious as a yellow-fever patient—and helped himself to a cigar from the open box on the mantle-piece.

He had done it hundreds of times before, but

on this occasion Leonard was in a shocking bad temper, and he snapped out as he looked around:

"Pon my soul, you make yourself at home, South!"

"I generally do," was the composed reply, as the young gambler bit the end off the cigar.

"What's the row now, George?"

Leonard flushed nervously. He did not like to say what he meant, and South knew it; but he managed to get out, in a very dry tone:

"It's manners to say 'May I?' before you take a fellow's cigars."

South hunched his shoulders.

"Especially when they're such very bad ones. You ought to be complimented by my approval of the brand. I'm called a connoisseur."

"Perhaps you are," was the cold retort.

"I'm not asking opinions to-day."

The younger gambler looked at his host with considerable contempt, for Leonard kept his back turned, and South knew that the attitude was assumed on account of sheer inability to face another man in anger.

"Well, I swear," he said, with a show of some heat; "this is the first time I ever knew you to be mean, George—grudge your friends a cigar, do you?"

"No, I don't," was the half-peevish, half-apologetic reply. "You know that well enough, South; but a fellow might as well ask for what he wants."

South uttered a short laugh.

"Well, if a man's got to go down on his knees and ask you every time he wants a smoke in your house, the best thing he can do is to use his own weeds. I'll do it hereafter. I apologize for taking your cigar without leave, Mr. Leonard, and I'll go and smoke it in my own room, till you're in a better temper. Ta, ta, dear boy."

And he went out of the room, with an affectation of anger that deceived his host, who called anxiously after him:

"Charley! oh, Charley! Don't be mad. I didn't mean it. Take all the cigars you like."

South turned at the door to say:

"Thank you humbly. I'm not mad, as you call it. What a beastly caddish word that is! Why can't you say 'angry,' dear boy?"

Then he was off, having obtained his point of leaving his rich dupe in the wrong, and willing to wait for a better time to propose a game of poker.

When he had gone, Leonard smoked on uneasily for a while, and at last said:

"What did you mean just now, Stone, about that show? How can we break it up, and how can I get the girl?"

Stone had his face turned to the wall, and he had been waiting patiently for this very question; but he affected to groan out:

"Lemme 'lone! Sick to talk! Oh!"

Leonard looked sympathizingly at once, and curious withal; the very condition of mind Stone had intended to produce.

"I don't want to urge you too much, dear boy," he said, softly, "but I don't quite understand you. That was a doosid nice girl we saw yesterday—doosid pretty, and all that. It would be a feather in my cap to get her, but how am I going to do it? Besides, I thought you were sweet on her yourself? You said so."

Stone listened to him and then affected to undergo great pain in rising, as he turned over and sat up.

By speaking slowly he could make himself well understood.

"Don't make a mistake," he said. "I was sweet on her—yesterday. She was pretty and smart. But owing to her yelling out 'Hey, Rube!' I got my face spoiled for life by her gang—I want no more of her, for love."

Leonard looked relieved.

"I'm glad of that," he said, frankly, "for you're the only fellow I'm afraid of, dear boy. You're a devil among the women."

Stone did not even smile at the compliment, which he knew to be sincere.

"Well," he pursued, slowly, "the field's free for you, but you can't get the girl."

"Why not?" asked Leonard sharply.

"You don't know enough," was the dry and uncompromising reply.

Leonard colored up angrily, to retort:

"Don't I, indeed? Confound you, Colden, you seem to think I'm a baby in arms, and can't take care of myself. Haven't I got enough money to buy that paltry show a dozen times over; haven't I?"

Stone had thrown himself back in the corner of the sofa to allow his friend to vapor on. He knew his final control over him at all times.

When Leonard finished, the other said in the slowest and driest way:

"No. That show's not for sale."

"Then what do you mean?" cried his dupe, peevishly. "Confound you, Colden, you don't know yourself, I believe."

Stone waited placidly to reply.

"I know one thing, George."

"And what's that?"

"That you can't get that girl without my help. And she's as pretty as a picture, too. What a sensation she'd make if you took her out

in the Park when you go to town, or in the hunt in Queen's county. She'd show 'em all the way, dear boy."

Leonard's eye glittered. The tempter had struck the right chord.

"But how am I to know if she'd run away with me?" he said. "She might want me to marry her, you know."

Stone sneered openly.

"A circus girl virtuous? Well, you are greener than I thought, George."

He spoke with such candor that the young learner in vice blushed at his own innocence, and answered hastily:

"Of course I know all that, but, then, confound it, she might want to drive a hard bargain."

"Of course she would. That's her business," returned his friend, coldly. "And it's your business to make the best bargain you can, dear boy. That's plain, isn't it?"

Leonard looked puzzled.

"No, it isn't plain. How am I to get her to come cheap, if she won't?"

Stone looked at him from head to foot.

"Well, George, you are green," was his quiet comment.

He said not another word, but went to the mantle-piece and took a cigar, without reproof from his host, who watched him light it and puff the smoke out in silence.

He was puzzled and helpless, and Stone knew it well.

He intended him to be so. It was by humiliating the would-be *roue*, and showing him his inferiority in artistic vice, that he maintained his control over a fortune of several millions of dollars, in George Leonard's person.

Presently the dupe burst out:

"Confound it, I can't see it!"

"Don't suppose—(puff)—you could—(puff). Never—(puff)—expected it," was the composed reply of Stone.

"Confound it, Colden, don't chaff a fellow," cried Leonard, angrily. "I know I'm not as smart as you—"

"Hem!" commented his friend. "When did you find that out? Seems to me you played smart last night. Got off without a mark at my expense."

Leonard looked contrite at once.

He was timid and nervous, though not an entire coward, and he was always much ashamed at his own lapses from the path of courage, in face of his friend's conduct. For Stone had daring enough, if he possessed few other virtues.

"I know I ought not to have run last night," he said, apologetically; "but I own I lost my nerve when I saw you sent flying so easily. They all ran. South ran the hardest."

Stone looked his most disdainful.

"South indeed! He's a pattern for pluck. Well, you did right. You showed yourself smarter than I. Now carry on the affair in your own way. I've no more to say."

"But at least tell me what you mean," urged Leonard, looking scared.

"No, I won't. What's the use? It requires courage and brains to execute my plan, though it's sure to succeed."

"Are you quite sure it would succeed?" asked Leonard, anxiously.

"Sure? Of course. It's founded on human nature and dollars and cents. There's no such word as fail there."

"But what is it?"

"That's my affair."

"But you'll tell me."

"No, I won't."

"Why not?"

"Because you'd hesitate; ask some other fellow's advice—South's perhaps—and he would sell you out to the other side."

"Colden, dear boy, I swear solemnly I'll never tell a soul, if you'll tell me."

"That's not enough. You must promise to follow my plan implicitly. After all, if you don't, I can execute it alone, and then I'll take the girl myself. I don't want her for love, but I'd like to punish her. And I can get any woman I set my mind on, if I choose. You know that, George."

George shivered. Finally he said:

"Colden, if you'll promise, on your word, I shall have the girl, I'll embrace your plan and do just as you say."

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright."

Stone struck his hand in Leonard's palm.

"Done! You shall have her in three weeks, at your feet, begging to be saved from the workhouse and sheriff. I know how to work the business. I've been there. Let me alone for a week, till my face gets well enough to be out and we'll go to work."

"But how, how? Tell me how?"

"By working the other show, man. These showmen would cut each other's throats for five dollars apiece. I saw the other fellow—Bownse they call him—and had a talk with him. He wants only a little money and a little help to enable him to steal Pop Hicks's best attractions and ruin his show. I'll work it. I've been in the business before, and know how to do it. I'll go at it to-day by letter, and as soon

as my face is presentable we'll follow up that show and kill it."

"And what am I to do?" asked Leonard, bewildered at the rapid talk of his friend, who had even forgotten to snuffle in his excitement.

"Nothing—stop—yes. Your mines are in Coalville. How many men are there in your employ there?"

"About fifteen hundred."

"Good. When they strike Coalville, we'll run 'em out. I must find their route and fix it ahead. Let them forget all about it, and some day, when they least expect it, come down on them like lightning out of a clear sky. Then they'll remember Colden A. Stone. And then, George, you can take your pick of the girls in that show, or I'm a fool."

Perhaps you are, Mr. Stone. Money and villainy go a long way, but virtue and courage go further. We shall see how your plan works after awhile.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE ROAD.

POP HICKS'S show was on the road in Northern Pennsylvania, moving from Anthracite City to Pittsville Station, after a week of poor business.

Pop had experienced opposition before, but never in such a form as it had come on him that year.

He had run on rival shows, crossing their routes, following or preceding them, and had had his share of the ups and downs of show life, as all showmen have.

But this was the first time that a rival had followed him from stand to stand for a whole week, showing at the same hours, pitching tents opposite to him, flooding the town with paper at the same time, making parades on parallel streets and drawing away crowds, so that there was no such thing as a paying house for either party to the controversy.

When he started out, that morning, in his old red-wheeled road-cart, with the big piebald horse in front, with Moone on the same seat, to get to Pittsville Station before the show and distribute bills, he wore a very serious face, and as soon as they were alone, ahead, broke out:

"Moone, this won't do; it won't do."

Moone shrugged his shoulders.

"I know that, Mr. Hicks."

"But what are we going to do, boy? What are we going to do? I've been in the show business forty-five years now, and never saw such a time. Who's behind Bownse? Who's behind him? He hasn't got stamps enough to stand this racket. He's losing more'n I am, every day."

"He's losing exactly one third more than you are," replied Moone, who had a way of making statements that impressed all show people with the idea that he was a very deep person. "I've had a man counting the houses, every town, and I know his expenses to a dime. He's losing just two hundred dollars a day."

"And we've been out ten days," mused the old showman, "and I've lost twelve hundred already. Moone, it won't do. A wet week would cost us five thousand dollars, easy, and I can't afford to lose it. We've got to compromise somehow."

Moone looked at the dash-board intently, but offered no observation, till Pop Hicks continued irritably:

"Why don't you speak? What's to be done? How are we going to get out of this?"

Moone turned and looked at him.

"I'm only your newspaper man, sir," he said.

"If you've any orders to give, I'll take them." Pop Hicks dealt the piebald a sharp cut that sent it off its regular trot, and compressed his lips angrily as the cart bounded forward.

"Can't you give us your ideas?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir," replied Moone.

But he said nothing more, and Pop Hicks snapped out, angrily:

"Give 'em then, you cold-blooded little sinner. What's the use of a little guy like you, if he hasn't an idea in his head? You can't ride; you can't jump; you can't holler; you can't do an act worth ten dollars a week. What's the good of you, if you don't have ideas? Spit 'em out. What ought we to do?"

Thus urged, little Moone, who justified his employer's epithet, "cold-blooded little sinner," by never getting into a passion, demanded:

"Am I to understand you are asking my advice as to what we can do to escape a failure this season, Mr. Hicks?"

"Yes, yes, of course. That's what I said."

"Then, sir, I suppose you mean to follow it?"

Pop Hicks turned and stared at him in mingled surprise and anger.

The old man had been a great acrobat in his day, and was as strong as a horse yet. He changed his reins to the other hand and caught Moone by the scruff of the neck in his huge paw, saying, with a certain grim playfulness:

"Look here, you cold-blooded little varmint, if you give me any more of that sauce, blame me if I don't pitch you out of the wagon. Follow your advice? If it agrees with my own notions, and if it's good. Nothing more. Now go ahead, and don't come any of your games on me. What do you advise me to do?"

Moone rearranged his rumpled collar and looked at the dash-board again.

"When you choose to ask it in a proper manner, I'll give it, Mr. Hicks. I'm not your slave, and I'm willing to take my dismissal to-morrow."

It was his way of treating his big and testy employer, and generally it succeeded to a charm.

He was such a puny little fellow, with a pale face and general air of ill-health, that a big man like Pop could not find it in his heart to use violence toward him, while the pluck in his small frame never gave way, except in the presence of a general free fight, when he wisely got out of the road of larger men.

Pop Hicks looked at him for a moment with a frown, and then burst out in a laugh, and slapped his back, crying:

"There, there, Mooney, make it up. I didn't mean what I said. What's your advice? I never was in such a pickle before. What's your advice?"

"My advice is to get out," said Moone, quietly.

Pop started and frowned fiercely.

"Get out? What d'ye take me for? And have that suoozer, Bownse, going round, blowing how he drove Pop Hicks out his own route, that he's had for twenty years? You must be sick, Moone."

Moone shook his head.

"Not sick yet, Mr. Hicks; but I shall be, if this thing goes on much longer. It's no use my working my life out when this man follows us to every town. I like to see something come of my efforts, but this circuit isn't big enough to hold two shows."

"I know that as well as you do, but I'm not going to get off it for a stranger," returned Pop, obstinately. "Now then, remember that. What's your advice if I say I can't get out?"

Moone considered awhile.

"Then you must run the other man out, and the longest purse wins. You know that as well as I do, sir."

Pop Hicks nodded.

"Yes, I know that, and I know Bownse. He's well fixed; but I've as much as he has. That ain't it. There's some one behind him now. Who is it?"

Moone favored his employer with a blandly innocent look.

"How can I tell, if you can't, Mr. Hicks?"

Pop Hicks gave the piebald another cut, and said fretfully:

"Never mind. I thought you could. You're such a sly little guy. Never mind."

Moone looked up at his employer once more to say:

"I've an idea, if that will help you."

"What is it, what is it?"

"I think it's that man you put out of the show at Popokus, for queering Celestine's act."

Moone never took liberties, though on familiar terms with his employer, and always spoke of Sally Hicks by her ring name only.

Pop Hicks nodded thoughtfully.

"I thought as much. Who is he?"

"A rich mine-owner called Leonard."

"Where are his mines?"

"In Coalville."

Pop Hicks whistled.

"So!!! The dickens!"

Then he drove on silently for some little distance further, till at last he said:

"Moone!"

"Yes, sir."

"Coalville's my best holt on this circuit."

"I know it, sir."

"Made two thousand clear, last year, in it, and the men swear by Sally."

"Yes, sir."

"Hem! Hem!"

There was another short silence, and the old man burst out:

"Consarn the luck! I'm blowed to smash if I drop that place. It's worth more'n all the rest."

"You may have to drop it, Mr. Hicks."

"True, true. Don't deny it. If their boss is such a mean skunk as to order the men to stay away, they won't dare to come. I know that, well enough."

"That's not all, sir."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Suppose they raise a rumpus like the Popokus people did?"

Pop stirred uneasily in his seat.

"Why should they do that? We never had a muss with them. They like us."

"But, as you said, if their boss orders a muss, there's fifteen or sixteen hundred hard cases, with picks and shovels, to go through this show, and that will cost more than if we drop the town."

The old showman nodded.

"There's reason in that."

"And more than that, too, sir."

"What more?"

"If we work it right, we may get up a sympathy racket about Celestine's persecution by the dudes—"

Pop Hicks turned and looked at Moone for the first time with real severity.

"Look here, Moone," he said, "you're all business, and I don't quarrel with that. It's natural for you, I suppose, to see a story in everything, and make it up for the newspaper guys. But, by gosh, young fellow, I want you to understand one thing."

Here his voice sunk to a low and earnest tone, trembling with anger:

"My darter's my darter, and I don't want her name in no papers as havin' dudes after her. Celestine's all right; bokays are all right. Biz is biz. But I don't want my darter's name in every loafer's mouth, like a song-and-dance-woman. Sally rides her act, and that's the last of it. Write up that, all you like; but I don't want no sympathy rackets about Sally. You understand me?"

Moone bowed slightly. His cold, calculating little heart was touched in spite of himself at the old man's delicate pride in his child, and he answered, hurriedly:

"All right, sir, all right. I'll attend to it. But, suppose this Mr. Leonard keeps up his persecution. Either we've got to go under, or let people know what the trouble began with. He's behind Bownse, and I feel sure he's the party that is supplying him with money. What are we to do to fight him?"

Pop Hicks sighed heavily.

"Darned if I know, Moone. Darned if I know. That's why I want ideas. But, whatever comes, keep Sally's name out of the muss. That's flat."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN TOWN.

PITTSVILLE STATION was called "a good one-night stand," on Pop's circuit, and the tents were duly pitched, while the band-wagon paraded the town, and the performers followed in pairs for the edification of the gaping countrymen who crowded into town.

But, just as Pop had foreseen, when he entered town with Moone and began to shoot his "flyers" and "dodgers" through the air wherever he saw a crowd, Bownse's man entered with him, coming by another road, and Bownse's band made the streets echo, interfering with his own band and distracting the attention of the "guys," as he had done before.

The old showman fumed and fretted; but little Moone, who sat beside him, said nothing, though he watched every face around them.

At last he pulled Pop's sleeve and whispered, in a guarded tone:

"There they are. I knew it."

"Who, who?" asked Pop, irritably.

"The mashers we put out. There's the main guy himself in the English box drag, or break, or whatever they call it, and the other's the man that Noble knocked."

"Noble? Noble? who's Noble?" asked Pop, in his quick, nervous way.

"The beast man in Bownse's show. Didn't you know it?"

"Know what?"

"That he helped us in the muss at Popokus, when the girls screamed?"

Pop shook his head. The matter had been kept from him, and he had been too busy in the fight himself to take any notice of side issues.

"No. I never heard of it. Girl's screamed? What about?"

"I don't know, except that those dudes, while the row went on in front, tried to scare the girls at the back of the tent; and this Noble went for 'em and knocked 'em stiff."

Pop Hicks looked thoughtful.

"No, I didn't know it. I know they helped us at last, when the townies hit one of their men. I'd have done the same for them. No showman can go back on the old cry, 'Hey, Rube!' But say, Moone—"

"Yes, sir."

"That Noble must be a decent boy. If his folks are like him, we might patch up a peace."

Moone shook his head.

"Look out yonder at that black drag, and you'll see why we can't make any peace, Mr. Hicks. That's the man that's behind Bownse."

"And there's Bownse, too," muttered Pop.

"Cheek by jowl with the solid guys." He saw ahead of him the well-known yellow road-coat of Mr. G. B. Bownse; with the manager of the "Show of all Shows," hat in hand, bowing to the people; while, side by side with his vehicle, was a stylish English break, with four iron-gray horses with silver-plated harness; a smart groom in the rumble, and a pair of fashionably dressed gentlemen on the box.

The driver was dark, and the man beside him was fair; otherwise they were dressed alike, and looked very much alike; while the drag behind them was full of gay bloods of the same kind as themselves.

All were smoking cigars; all looked rakish and rich; and the people on the sidewalks stared at them more than at Bownse's road-cart, though that was made on purpose to attract.

But the feature that struck Pop with most force was, that the ultra rich party was evidently on familiar terms with the Bownse party, and that the occupants of the drag exchange-

ed witticisms with the riders and ladies of the rival parade, as they passed.

His own show was coming up another street, and Pop was irresolute what to do, when Moone pulled his arm.

"Make a bold stroke," he said, "and find out if they really know what they're about. Then you'll know."

Pop nodded and touched up the piebald with the whip.

"The man driving is the guy that wanted to draw a pistol," he said; "but I guess he was too drunk to know who grabbed him. I'll try 'em with some dodgers."

The old man drove boldly out by the rival procession, recognized by many on the sidewalks, for he was an old favorite, and saluted with clapping of hands and cries of:

"Bravo, Pop! Hooray for Pop Hicks!"

The party in the drag never turned their heads his way, till Moone, with a dextrous fling, sent a whole fistful of bills into the drag, an act which raised a cheer from the crowd.

Pop watched the drag party keenly as he passed by, and looked straight up into the face of the driver.

It was Stone, the man he had put out, looking much the same as he had been, but for a certain fixity of color on the cheek near the eyes, which made the old man mutter:

"By the hookey! He's made up, Moone. He must have been in our line."

Moone looked up also.

"He's had his black eye painted, that's all. I wonder if he knows who gave it to him?"

Pop shrugged his shoulders and drove on.

The driver had not deigned to cast a glance his way, but the fair man next to him had looked down on him with a certain supercilious scorn that made Pop smile to himself.

When he had passed their parade he turned a corner to meet his own.

"By gum, Moone," he said, "I ain't a-goin' to be bested no more. I'm goin' to bring 'em up side by side, and let the people see which is the best show, for all their four-in-hands."

With that he dashed ahead of his own column, and switched it off to another street, by which it would approach the public square of the town from the opposite side at the same time as the "Show of all Shows," meeting it face to face, something he had not yet tried with Bownse.

To carry out his plan he had to trot his teams, and, as they rattled ahead, the beasts in the open cages began to roar, the people began to run and cheer, and other people came flocking in from side streets, while Pop Hicks, smiling with triumph, cracked his whip over the big piebald, and Moone sent the "flyers" shooting through the air like flocks of butterflies.

On they went, with a thunder and crash and bang, the people leaving the other parade by hundreds to find out what was the matter, and when they finally dashed into the square they found it packed with crowds running to meet them, while the other column was emerging from the opposite side street, well-nigh deserted, but still headed by the fashionable four-in-hand.

Then old Pop turned to Moone, pride in his eye, and remarked:

"The old man's hard to beat yet, hey? If it's to be a fight, by gum! I believe in lettin' 'em know it from the word go! Hey, Moone, hey?"

Moone said nothing, but watched.

The people in the other parade were evidently demoralized by the move, for they came on very slowly, and there was quite a gap between the drag and the head of the column.

Pop Hicks's people swept into the square and took possession of the principal part before Bownse had made up his mind what to do, and thus the two shows came into direct comparison, side by side, the very thing that Bownse had most reason to fear on his own account.

For he had, to tell truth, rather a sorry lot of performers, fitter for a side show or a Bowery museum than to come out as a regular circus.

He had General Egypt, the Giant; Mrs. Abigail, the Fat Lady; Mr. Cadaver, the Skeleton, with several pad-riders and a good hurdle-act man. But he had no show of tumblers; his horses were poor, and his show was devoid of an elephant like King Philip; though he had a little fellow, about six feet high, that made shift to perform tricks.

What he lacked in elephants, however, he made up in another feature—the grand card of his show, and lauded above all the rest on bills and posters.

He had a cage of handsome lions and tigers, with a pair of slim, graceful leopards, all of which were trained and handled by a gentleman who, on the bills, was known as "Professor Noble, King of the Brute Creation," and in private life as "Charley Noble, the beast man."

He rode in the cage with his beasts on parade, and occasionally brought out one of his lions, a creature with a magnificent mane that swept the ground when it stood, and rode with this lion on an open platform, his hand on the brute's neck; as on that day.

People gazed at the pair with awe in Pittsville Station, and even Pop Hicks, as they passed, said to Moone, with unconcealed admiration:

"Hey, but that man's a good card! Wish I had him myself. Wish I had him! I'd make 'em see stars. Hey, Moone, hey?"

Moone replied critically:

"He's a good card; but all they've got, sir. We've got four or five."

Pop grinned, not ill-pleased.

"You're right, boy, right, quite right. So we have, so we have. But, all the same, that Noble's a first-rate card. And he's a good-looking fellow, too. Hanged if he ain't."

He was indeed, as he stood there by his lion, on the summit of the platform-car, in his crimson tights and spangles, with a frank, bold face, close, curly brown hair, and short-clipped mustache. He looked stout, and so well-rounded that Moone said:

"How fat he is!"

Pop Hicks shook his head.

"Fat! No, no. He's as thin as a rail, boy. That's all muscle. See when he moves. He's a regular strong man. If the lions went back on him he could do a good cannon-ball act, and I'll bet on it. Hallo! who's that he's bowing to in our crowd? By Jiminy, if it ain't—"

He did not finish the sentence.

The two columns were passing in opposite directions, the performers pretending not to see each other, till Noble's car came opposite the middle of Pop's procession, where King Philip stalked along with his tusks chained down to his forelegs, Jim Perkins riding on his back, while Sally Hicks, Fanny Rounder, Tom Fowler and Ma'm'zelle Hippolyte rode together before the elephant.

Then the handsome lion-tamer looked earnestly at the procession, and Sally Hicks looked up at him.

To Pop's astonishment and indignation, he saw his saucy daughter kiss her hand and smile at Noble, while the lion-tamer, on his part, executed a profound and very graceful salutation to her.

Pop was speechless for a moment, then colored up red as fire, and ejaculated under his breath:

"Well, by gum! Mashing in the other show, by gum! I'll soon stop that, by gum! Hey, Moone?"

"If I was you, I wouldn't do any such thing," was Moone's quiet reply.

Pop seemed startled by what he said, for he ejaculated confusedly:

"Hey? Why not, why not, why not?"

"Because," said the little man, dryly, "if you want that fish, there's no surer way of catching it than on a hook baited with love; that's all."

Pop turned and looked at him keenly, then stared at the rival show as if in a dream, till all had passed by, and finally said, in a sober sort of way:

"Moone, by gum, I'm gettin' old."

Moone grinned.

"When did you find that out?"

"To-day, Moone. I'm getting old, and Sally's growing to be a woman, by gum! And I never seen it, by gum!"

It seemed to set the old man thinking, for he said no more till the parade turned into the show-ground, five minutes ahead of Bownse's people, followed by a great crowd.

Then he observed thoughtfully:

"Moon, you've got some good ideas. Say, it would kinder turn the tables on Bownse if we stole his best man."

Moone smiled dubiously.

"Or if Noble stole Celestine. Did you ever think of that?"

CHAPTER IX.

TREACHERY IN CAMP.

THE afternoon show at Pop Hicks's tent passed off splendidly, owing to the prestige he had gained by his parade, and the old showman had the satisfaction of seeing his rival's crowd come out, looking slim, when he went off to his tea.

He did not wait to see the last of Mr. Bownse's show, or he would have noticed the manager himself come out, in close conversation with the sporting dude who had driven the drag.

They parted at the door, and Stone said to Bownse as he shook hands:

"Remember, we'll see you out of it at any hazard, and deposit the cash."

"All right, colonel," responded Bownse, as he went away, and then he betook himself to a little tavern on a side street, near his own show, where he found two or three quiet, shabby-looking men hanging around the doorway.

They had the peculiar observant and furtive look of people who are accustomed to do a good deal of waiting round shows till their services are needed, with their eyes open to watch everything that goes on in the crowd.

Bownse beckoned to one of them and took him aside to say:

"Ed, do you know any men in the other show to speak to?"

Ed hesitated a moment. He did not know whether his principal would like his telling the truth that he *did*, so he answered:

"By sight, sir. I can do it if you want to."

Bownse nodded.

"I want to see their elephant man. Can you get him to meet me on the quiet?"

Ed looked proud.

"Jim Perkins—Elephant Jim—you mean, sir? I was with him in a show last year. Know him well?"

Bownse betrayed no satisfaction, for he did not want to make his men think their services were worth more than the paltry pittance they received.

He looked at his watch.

"Get him to meet me at the Porter House in ten minutes. Can you do it?"

Ed nodded respectfully.

"Yes, sir; I'll bring him, sir."

Then Bownse, just to pass away the time, with the showman's instinct of popularity, when it could be gained with no expenditure, added:

"I'm watching you, Ed, and at the end of the season I'm going to take care of the men whom I find I can trust. In ten minutes, Ed."

Then he strode away, looking around him with queer, absent-minded glances, a way he had, which was more than half affectation, and intended to convey the idea that he had a great deal on his mind.

As for Ed, he went away to find Jim Perkins, the elephant man, his head whirling with visions of permanent engagements at high salaries, soft berths in the box-office, and a hundred such illusions, common in the lower ranks of the show business, where many starve that one may fatten.

As a matter of fact, he had met Jim several times on the road, and had had more than one drink at Jim's expense, for the elephant man had a big salary, and, being a bachelor, spent it freely in fine clothes and much whisky.

Ed had but little trouble in running Jim down that day. He knew that the elephant man always lodged near the stable, in case his beast should get troublesome, and he found him just taking a cocktail at the bar of a small, second-class hotel, across the way from the show lot.

Jim looked around as he came in, and nodded familiarly.

"Take suthin', Ed?"

Ed couldn't refuse, so he came up by his big friend and whispered to him, as the cocktail was being made:

"Say, Perk, I want to see you outside."

Perkins looked down at him with the sharp, furtive scrutiny of the showman.

"All right. Here's luck!"

The drinks dispatched, they went outside, and Ed delivered his message.

"He wants to see you bad, Jim, for next season. We ain't done no biz to speak of, and you kin get anything you want!"

Jim considered a little, and finally said, in the coarse, insolent way of a man who knew his own value:

"Let him come to me. I'm all right as I am."

If he wants me, let him come here."

"But it'll be all over if ye do," urged Ed. "It's got to be done on the quiet, Jim. He ain't stopping at the Porter House. We just go in to take a drink, that's all. Come along with me. It won't harm you."

So Jim allowed himself to be persuaded into a trip to the Porter House, where, as soon as they asked for Mr. Bownse, the clerk directed them up-stairs to a private parlor, and Ed piloted up his friend.

He did not venture to go in himself, but put in his head at the door to say:

"Mr. Perkins is come, sir."

"All right. Go back and get your supper," answered Bownse from within, and then Ed heard another voice say:

"Is that the man?"

So he knew some one else was inside with the manager, and wondered who it could be as he went away.

As for Elephant Jim, he strode in with his hat on his head, and nodded familiarly to Bownse, saying:

"How do, guvner? What's the racket?"

He had as many diamonds as Stone, and felt equal to all of them, so he could afford to be lordly in his ways.

Bownse affected to be very glad to see him and shook hands cordially, while he introduced Stone, who also put on his sweetest smile.

A long conversation ensued between the trio, which resulted in Elephant Jim saying, in a doubtful sort of way:

"I'll try what I kin do with Tom Fowler, gents, and Fanny, but I can't promise. You kin have me on the terms I said, and not a cent less; that's flat."

Stone laid his hand on the big man's knee to say, softly:

"There's another way we can manage it, Mr. Perkins, if you have the brains I think you have."

"And what's that?"

"You have a pretty troublesome brute in that elephant, haven't you?"

"You bet. I have to watch him all the time, and he's been getting worse since we've been on the road."

"I see you chain his foreleg to his tusk. What for?"

Jim grinned.
 "If I didn't you'd see fun some time when the hosses come too near him."
 "You mean he dislikes them?"
 "He jest hates 'em."
 "Then, if he happened to get loose while the performance was going on there might be trouble."

Jim nodded gravely.
 "Liveliest kind of trouble."
 "Would he hurt you?"
 Jim looked at him scornfully.
 "Hurt me! Why, dod rot his ugly old karkidge, he dassn't so much as give me a cross look. No, that I will say for elephants, when you've got 'em down, they stay down. Many's the time I've come in, drunker'n a b'iled owl, and gone to sleep between his feet. He wouldn't let a army tech me. Lordy, gents, I remember—"

Here Jim laughed at the recollection.
 "After the muss at Popokus, when I laid out a feller with my drivin'-hook, they sent the constables arter me and wanted to 'rest me. King Philip was there, and he jest made one rush and screech at 'em. You'd orter seen 'em put. Ha! ha!"

Stone listened to him quietly till he had finished, when he asked him:

"Then if he got loose you'd have no fear for yourself?"

"No, sir. But I'd pity the next man that got in the way."

Stone leaned over toward him.
 "How much would it be worth to let him have his own way to-night for a little?" he asked, slowly.

Elephant Jim started and looked at him fixedly, with a deep frown.

"Why, darn your skin," he growled. "You don't know what that means. He'd knock things flying. They'd have a panic. It can't be done."

Stone never wavered, while Bownse looked on curiously.

"How much is it worth?" asked the gambler, steadily. "Would you get drunk to-night, for instance, for a hundred dollars, and take his chains off?"

Elephant Jim, for the first time in the interview, looked uneasily at the superior villain, answering:

"No, nor for five. I don't—want—to do—no—such thing."

"I'll hand you a thousand and sign your engagement for next season at the terms you mentioned, if you'll do it to-night," answered Stone; and as he spoke he dived into his breast-pocket and brought out a big roll of bills.

"Come, I've no time to wait. Yes or no?"

Elephant Jim looked at the money and his eyes glittered, but he still hesitated.

"And s'pose our show breaks up, what then? I ain't goin' to get left, ye know."

"You shall come into my show at once," put in Bownse. "I'll be glad to get you at your own terms. I back all Mr. Stone says. He's my partner now."

Elephant Jim uttered a deep sigh, but kept his eye on the bills, which Stone kept on counting before him.

At last he said slowly:
 "Give me the money. I'll do it. But I warn you gents of one thing. *Get your show out of the way, or you'll be sorry.*"

Stone laughed as he handed him the money.
 "It's a bargain. Pop Hicks has had his last show this season."

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED MOVE.

WHEN Pop Hicks came back from tea that evening to prepare for the night show, he was amazed and delighted beyond measure to see that his rival had taken down his signs, and that the people of the other show were packing up to depart.

Mr. Bownse, in his road-cart, was driving here and there, scolding and swearing in his usual style, the big tent was down, and the wagons were loading up to go.

The old showman at first was too much astounded to speak. He could hardly believe his eyes. Such an open confession of defeat was like oil to his troubled spirit.

He did not go near his rival; for he was a man of peace and did not want to irritate any one needlessly.

But Bownse saw him, drove over to him and held out his hand frankly.

"Good-by, Pop," he said, with an affectation of resignation. "I know when I've had enough and you're too many guns for me. The world's wide enough for both of us, isn't it?"

Pop instantly grasped the proffered hand.

"No malice between us, George, I hope," he said. "Business is business, and you've given me the liveliest wrastle I ever had. But, as you say, what's the use of two men losing money? It's my old route, and I couldn't let a new man drive me off, could I?"

Bownse pretended to be cordial.
 "No, no, I don't blame you a bit, Pop," he said. "I'd have done the same if I could. I'm going to switch off at the next town. You're too many guns for me, and I'm off."

Pop hesitated. He had all a showman's generosity to a man in distress.

"Say, Bownse," he began, "you must have lost a heap of money—"

"You bet I have, but that needn't worry you," was the reply.

"No; but I was thinking that we might make a deal, George. There ain't enough for two of us, fighting each other, but you've got some features I'd jest as soon take off your hands, and combine the shows."

Bownse grinned.
 "And what would become of the rest? No, Pop. Each man to his own row. I ain't bankrupt yet, ye know. Maybe we'll see each other again. Good-by."

The rival showman drove off, and Pop went to hunt up Moone, to whom he said in his quick way:

"Heard the news, hey? Heard it?"

"Nothing but what I've expected," said Moone, tranquilly. "Elephant Jim's gone on a tear."

Pop started angrily.

"On a tear? It's too bad. He swore he'd keep straight till the season was over. It's too bad. Consarn his skin! Are you sure of it?"

"Saw him come out of the Porter House and he's got his war-paint on. We're going to have trouble, Mr. Hicks."

Pop stamped his foot.

"It's too bad, too bad. And just as we had run Bownse out of town, too. It's enough to make a saint swear."

Moone remained placid. He never showed surprise at anything.

"Has Bownse given up?" he asked. "I didn't think he would, so soon."

"But he has, he has. He's moving out now, and told me he was going to switch off at the next town."

"When did he tell you?"

"Just now."

Moone shrugged his shoulders.

"Then it's lucky Perkins took his freak when it will do least harm," he said.

Pop snatched at the grain of comfort with eagerness.

"So it is, so it is. We'll have to do without King Philip to-night. We'll have all the guys that's left, anyhow."

Moone seemed to be unusually thoughtful at the news, for he repeated:

"So Onion George has caved in, has he? That's queer, very queer. Mr. Hicks, do you know I think there's a trick in it?"

"A trick? How can there? The man's gone. I saw him."

"But he'll come up, next place."

"I expect that. He'll try to show a day ahead of me, all the way. But what of that? We can skip a day, and head him off. I wasn't born yesterday."

Still Moone seemed unconvinced.

"I tell you there's crooked work in it all, Mr. Hicks. You'll see it."

Pop looked vexed as he retorted:

"If there is, it's your business to find it out. What do I pay you for?"

"You're quite right, sir," calmly replied the little agent; "and that's just what I'm going to do. Will you lend me the cart?"

"Certainly. Find out all you can. If there's any trick in it, I'll make it hot for Onion George, you bet your boots."

"Onion George" was a name given to Mr. Bownse in the profession, on account of his great fondness for the succulent and aromatic bulb which forms a leading ingredient in Spanish cookery. He was called "Onion George" just as Jim Perkins was as often called "Whisky Jim" as "Elephant Jim."

Pop Hicks went off to his show, while little Moone took his cart and drove off on another road to intercept the Bownse show, where he was well known and rather liked than otherwise by several individuals with whom he had traveled the previous season.

Bownse was not with the column, or Moone would not have gone near it; but people in rival show establishments are very good friends with each other, when the manager is not in sight.

Moone pretty soon came across General Egypt, the Giant, who rode in a wagon, wrapped up in a fur coat, though the night was not cold.

General Egypt was a remarkable giant in his way, for he fondly imagined he had brains, and was very ambitious of becoming an author—in partnership with some one who would do the writing, while he furnished the "ideas," as he said.

Moone had had a great deal of fun with him in the past season, and as soon as the general saw the little agent he held out his huge paw, saying:

"Just the man I wanted to see. How about that story we were to write, Moone? I tell you there's millions in it, properly handled."

"I'm working on it," replied Moone, gravely.

"I can't do much on the road, you know. In the winter we'll bring it out. But say, general, where are you going?"

General Egypt chuckled.

"Don't know and don't care. This is a regu-

lar fool of a show. Manager don't know his own mind, and takes in a crooked guy, looks like a sharp, to run the machine. I don't care. They've got to pay me, Saturdays, or I know the reason why. I don't go begging for engagements like some folks."

"Who's the guy?" asked Moone, quietly.

"Blanked if I know. Call him Stone. But I say, Moone, about that story. I've got a splendid idea for you—"

Moone cut him off.

"Keep it for the winter. Don't talk of it. Ideas are money, general. Don't breathe a word. Don't you know story-writers are regular thieves? Not a conscience among ten, to go round one man. Are all your people here?"

Egypt nodded.

"All but Charley Noble."

"Ah, where's he?"

The giant leaned over him to whisper mysteriously:

"Hush! hush! A lady in the case. Don't say I told you. It's a mash in your show. Didn't you see him in the parade to-day?"

"No. What did he do?"

This was a lie; but Moone made a practice of lying in his business, if he could gain a point on it.

The general laid his finger on his nose.

"Don't say I said it. He was mashing on your leading lady. He's gone—dead gone—it's a joke on him."

"Is she a joke, too?" asked Moone.

"No, no, bless you, no. Perfect lady, for all I know—"

"You may be sure of that," interrupted Moone, very dryly.

"Of course, of course. And no one in the show says a word to his face either. He's a hard case, you know. Gad, I wouldn't like to get into a muss with him myself, unless I had a good hold of him to start with. He's like his own tigers in quickness, and kicks like a stud-horse."

"And he's stayed behind?" asked Moone.

"Yes. That is, he didn't come with his cages and left word he'd meet us next town. I wouldn't wonder if you found him round your show to-night. But say, Moone, about that story. It ought to be worth a good deal, handled right."

Moone escaped from him by saying:

"I think it is. In fact, I'm going to write to some publishers, to-morrow, asking for the best terms. I'll let you know. Good-by. See you later."

Then he drove back to town, having found out what he wanted to know.

The cause of the move was a secret in the Bownse show, and Noble must be the only person who knew it, if indeed he did.

The little agent drove back to town in a very thoughtful mood. He could not yet quite understand what was going on, but he suspected the worst, it being his habit to suspect every one in business.

He arrived at the show just as the doors were opened for the evening, and scanned the people as they went in very carefully, after having put up his horse.

He was looking for the dudes of his fears, and half expected to see them.

Instead of that he saw a crowd of eager country people, anxious to get front seats, and keeping the ticket-man busy taking in money, till the rush ended.

Moone felt that thrill of virtuous pleasure which comes of good business, as he watched the steady stream of silver dropping in, and was not surprised to hear old Pop's voice beside him, saying:

"Got 'em this time; hey, Moone, hey?"

"Yes, sir," responded Moone, soberly. "Is Jim Perkins inside, yet?"

Pop shook his head, and drew him back to whisper:

"Don't mention it before them; but King Philip's as ugly as sin to-night. Thank goodness he's well chained; but I'm afraid we'll have to give him a good lesson after the show's over. He can't go on; that's certain. We'll put it all on Jim being sick. By gum, it's true!"

Even as he spoke, they heard a great noise of trampling in the stables, and the angry scream of the elephant.

Pop Hicks looked around uneasily.

"Hope it won't scare the guys," he said.

On the contrary, the noise of the screaming attracted a crowd, and they began to pile into the show faster than ever, so that Moone observed:

"Let him holler. He's safely tied, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes, for the matter of that we've got him all crippled so he can't move; but he makes such a noise he scares the horses. I say, Moone, suppose you hunt up Jim and get him to come and sleep with the King. It's the only thing that quiets the brute in one of his tantrums."

Moone was about to answer, when they heard a wild, drunken howl near the tent, and saw the redoubtable Elephant Jim himself approaching them, waving his hat in the air, and screaming at the top of his voice:

"I'm Jim Perkins, the Elephant Emperor, and I kin whip any man that ever wore hair on his head. Whoop!"

CHAPTER XI.
ELEPHANT JIM.

SOME men get stupid drunk, and go to sleep peaceably; others weep and lament over their woes and the whisky; others are full of fun and music; still others are grave and owl-like in their wisdom, while the remaining class puts on war-paint and goes on a tear.

Jim Perkins generally began by fun and singing, ending up by putting on his war-paint, when he got frantic with excitement.

He was a very tall man, with a tremendous skeleton and hard, brown muscle all over him but as thin as a rail. His hair and eyes were dark, his complexion naturally sanguine, his temperament excitable, and he was kept in a constant state of nervous tension by the gigantic brute he had to keep in control.

The enormous strength and viciousness of his charge, and the watchfulness to which it impelled him, gave him a contempt for the opposition of mankind; and he gloried in the complete subjection to which he had brought King Philip.

Drink had brought out all his qualities, especially his vanity and ferocious daring, and he kept shouting as he came:

"Here goes Elephant Jim, Emperor of the beasts! Ten thousand dollars, no other man can handle King Philip, and I'll whip the hide off the sucker that goes to deny it. *Whoop! Hooaloo-aloo!!*"

The country people shrunk out of the way in dismay, but old Pop Hicks instantly started forward to meet Jim, saying:

"Good-evening, Mr. Perkins. Come along in. I want to speak to you on business."

Jim would have struck him had he shown any fear, and might have resented any sort of reproach, but the commonplace tone and jolly manner completely disarmed him, so that he burst out into a laugh, threw his arms round Pop's neck and shouted:

"Pop Hicks, by Jerushy, you're a gentleman, sir, 'n I know it! Gentleman, Pop Hicks, the oldest showman in the business, and the best, by Jerushy! I'll lick the man that says he ain't. *Hey! Whoop!*"

But the men of the show were too much used to drunken people to hesitate what to do, when a thing of this sort took place in front of the ticket-wagon.

Pop gave a signal, and a good dozen of men rushed on Jim and hauled him off to the ring entrance, howling and laughing, but good-natured, till they got him to his unwieldy and vicious pet, when they threw him in under King Philip's tusks, and he rolled over between the animal's feet and went to sleep forthwith.

The gigantic brute, the moment before, had been "weaving" its head uneasily, shifting from foot to foot as well as the chains would allow it, striking viciously at everything that passed with its trunk, and occasionally trumpeting furiously so as to frighten all the horses. King Philip was growing more and more angry, so that the oldest beast men in the show did not dare to go near him, and they began to feel anxious about the strength of the iron chains that confined him.

Besides the bands round his tusks, by which his head was bound down to the steel gyves on his forelegs, so as to cripple his motion, huge chains were padlocked on his hind legs, and passed around an anchor that was supposed to be capable of defying his wildest efforts.

Yet the great brute had drawn the anchor half out of its bed before Jim was brought in, and the hands in the show had passed a thick cable round it, for fear it should come out, taking the ends of the cable under the tent to a large tree close by, in the lot.

But the moment King Philip felt his master rolling helpless under his feet, the whole mood of the brute changed. He ceased to "weave" his head and shift his feet, which he spread apart so as not to hurt the drunken man while he softly caressed him with his trunk and uttered a low whining sound, expressive of affection and joy at Jim's return.

As for the drunken man himself, he seemed to be perfectly satisfied with his position; for he rolled over on his back, clasped King Philip's trunk in his arms, and growled out:

"Was ye glad to see me, ye old thief? *Whoop! Go to blazes, all of ye.*"

And in five minutes he was snoring like a pig, when Pop Hicks said to the men:

"Keep him in sight, and don't let him get out again. I guess he'll sleep now."

They went away, leaving the elephant-trainer snoring between King Philip's feet, while quiet settled over the show, and Pop Hicks returned to the door.

It wanted half an hour yet to the opening of the performance, but the house was filling rapidly, and Pop rubbed his hands as he watched the steady stream of people flowing in, and remarked to Moone:

"Guess the trouble's over, hey? What do you think, hey? What d'ye think?"

Moone's only answer was:

"Have the girls come yet, sir?"

"No—no—why d'ye ask, why, why?"

"Because I find that Lion Charley Noble

stayed behind from their show, and I've got a kind of idea we shall find him with our girls, somewhere."

"Hem! hem! Why d'ye think so?"

"I judge from human nature, sir. Didn't you take every chance you could get to see Mrs. Hicks before you were married?"

Pop Hicks sighed slightly.

"Ay, ay, boy—I did, I did. Poor Sally! My Sally's jest like her, at her age. Little bit of a woman. Used to do bareback. Most pluck of any woman I ever saw. Ay, ay, I suppose so. But look here, Moone, how's this? I don't know the man. Never spoke to him. How can Sally speak to him?"

"Zoralina was with him in the same show last year," returned Moone. "I wouldn't wonder but he works his little racket, all respectable, through her."

Pop frowned.

"What do you mean?—that my darter gets introduced to him by Zoe?"

"Why not, sir?"

Pop looked still more angry.

"Why not? By gum! I'd have you know, Mr. Moone, that my darter is my darter, and don't pick up with strangers out of her own show."

Moone laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll find girls the same all over, sir, no matter if they be managers' daughters."

Pop Hicks had been peering round in the now slowly gathering dusk; for it was getting time for the ladies of the show to come in, and now he interrupted Moone, with a voice of triumph, pointing down the street.

"You're mighty smart, Mr. Moone," he said, "but not as smart as you might be. There comes my darter, now, with the other gals; and they're all alone, jest as they always are."

Little Moone's eyes followed his, and he saw Sally Hicks, with Fanny Rounder, Bridget Stubbs (*alias* Hippolyte), and poor little Zoralina, who always looked so mournful, coming down the street to the tent, with no one but Tom Fowler, who was known as the steadiest of married men.

Moone said nothing, though he felt that he would rather his prophecy had come true; but, as it had not, he did like other wise prophets, held his peace on the subject and waited for the day when he could exclaim: "I told you so."

The girls went into the show, all but Sally, whose father beckoned to her to say, uneasily:

"Sally, child!"

"Yes, pa," she answered, looking up at him in her usual frank manner. "What's the matter? Business bad?"

"No, 'tain't that, Sally, but—"

"But what, pa?"

"Do you ever think of getting married, Sally?" asked the old showman, nervously.

Sally burst out laughing in a way that, had Pop been a student of human nature, outside of his own line, would have convinced him she was as yet but a child, with no ideas of love.

"Me? Married? What an idea, pa! That would be a racket!"

Then she giggled again, as if the idea were too preposterous.

"No, no, pa. As long as the guys come in, and you run the show, I'm your right bower, ain't I? You bet I am, and I know when I'm well off, too."

"There's this Noble," interrupted the old man, nervously. "You know him, don't you?"

He watched his daughter like a hawk, and saw she never changed color, though she smiled as one well pleased.

"Oh, yes, I know Lion Charley," she said, carelessly. "He's Zoe's mash, not mine. They used to be together in the Silver Palace Show, last year. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him come into our show to-night, about the time she goes on. She's dead game on him, you know, pa."

Pop was immensely relieved.

"Oh, is that it?" he said. "I'm glad you told me. Zoe's a good girl, and I guess he'd make her a good match. Be civil to the young fellow, Sally, and leave 'em all the chance you can."

"You bet I will," was the saucy reply. "I'm fly, pa. Two's company, three's none. But he hasn't been here to-night."

Then she went into the tent, and Pop was about going round to attend to his own dressing. When he heard, again, the well-known angry scream of King Philip, inside the tent, followed by a woman's shriek.

It was his daughter's voice, and the old man ran as hard as he could to the back entrance, where he rushed in, to find the performers in a bunch near the door, all chattering together.

"What's the matter? Where's Sally?" he asked, pale as death.

"Here, pa, not hurt," she answered, in rather a faint voice, and he saw her near the entrance, leaning up against Zoralina or Amelia Briggs, who looked as white as a sheet.

"What's the matter, then?" he asked, anxiously.

"Nothing—only—as I went by King Philip—I saw Jim Perkins asleep—between his feet—

and I—in fun—threw a peanut at him," she said, between suppressed pantings of fear, "and the brute nearly struck me with his trunk. Pa, why didn't you tell me he was in a bad temper to-night? I might have caught it."

"He didn't hit you, did he?" asked Pop, in a still more anxious tone.

"Only—only—a little brush—it was the wind knocked me down," she said, faintly. "I'll be better soon, pa."

But Old Pop Hicks strode off to the place where the elephant stood over its master, and called out angrily:

"Perkins! Jim Perkins! Wake up, you drunken brute! Wake up instantly."

CHAPTER XII.

LION CHARLEY.

ELEPHANT JIM heard the voice, and woke with a promptitude that surprised the showman, rolling over and roaring:

"Git out o' that, ye old thief! Who'n the blazes is that? *Whoop!*"

Then he scrambled up to a sitting posture, and rubbed his eyes, blinking.

"You, Jim Perkins," cried Pop, angrily, "do you know who I am, sir?"

Jim looked round and instantly bounded to his feet with a howl.

"*Whoop! Hooray for Pop Hicks! Th' best showman in ' States, b'gosh! Whoop! I'm Elephant Jim!*"

"Shut up your head and listen to me," cried Pop, angrily. "Your brute nearly hit my daughter just now. Do you know it, sir? Do you hear?"

Elephant Jim stood there, leaning up against King Philip's foreleg, blinking at his employer, but the words hardly seemed to penetrate to his consciousness, for he said, slowly:

"What's that? Wha' that?"

"I say your brute of an elephant very nearly killed my daughter, Sally Hicks, a moment since, while you lay, drunk as a fool, between his feet," cried Pop, in great excitement. "Is this your promise to me, Elephant Jim? You swore you'd keep sober, and here you are drunk again. And now you want to kill my Sally? Is that what you want to do?"

Elephant Jim seemed to be sobered at once by the accusation.

"Me kill Sally Hicks!" he repeated, as if overwhelmed with amazement. "Me? Why, Pop, I'd give King Philip himself, if she'd axed me for him."

"Well, you nearly let *him* kill her," said Pop, more placably. "She was going by, and the brute struck at her."

"He did, did he?" cried Elephant Jim. "Then, by gosh Jerushy, Pop, I'll jest give him the most all-firedest lambastin' he ever got in his life, arter this show's over. Hit at Sally Hicks will ye, ye old thief? What'd I tell ye? *Hey?*"

And with that he ran for a pitchfork and began to jab it into the elephant's sensitive trunk, till King Philip roared aloud with pain and tugged at his chains so hard that Pop shouted:

"Let be, Jim! Let be, you drunken idiot! Do you want him to break loose and start a panic? Let be!"

Jim started and drew back at the word "panic." It roused, in his muddled brains, some recollection of the compact into which he had entered that day with the opposite show, wherefor the money was still stuffed into his pockets.

He turned sullen and insolent at once.

"I ain't goin' to make no panic," he growled. "Drunk or sober, I'm able to take care of myself and King Philip, in any show in this country. I ain't beholden to no man. I can go where I please."

"Wherever you go," retorted Pop, firmly, "you'll keep your engagements, Perkins, or you'll find people won't trust you long. Now attend to your brute, and be ready to do your act when your time comes. You ain't dressed yet."

"Oh, it don't take me long to dress," the elephant trainer replied, in the same sulky way. "I'm ready to go on, dress or no dress. I know my biz."

Then to the elephant:

"Get up there, y' old thief! D'ye want to git me into disgrace?"

Pop looked at him a while, and finally became convinced that Jim was sobering down rapidly.

He had known him to do his act before, when boozy, and Jim Perkins never staggered, whatever his load of liquor.

So Pop went away to dress for the ring, and very soon after heard the stamping and clapping that told of the impatience of the audience for the show to begin.

He gave the signal while he was dressing, and watched King Philip narrowly while the horses of the opening cavalcade went by his box, toward the ring.

The elephant never noticed them, and Pop became satisfied that Jim was attending to his business.

He went into the ring and passed through the opening performance as usual, till the time came for Jim to perform his beast.

Then Professor Rabbetts sidled up to him, to ask in low tones:

"Is Perkin's safe? Shall I announce him or say he's sick?"

"Let me see first," said Pop. "A wait's better than a panic."

And he bustled into the stables to find Jim Perkins all ready, dressed, his eye a little wild, his face flushed, but apparently able to come on, while King Philip stood by him, *entirely unchained*, but quiet.

Pop looked at him uneasily.

"What made you take his tusk chains off?" he asked.

Jim scowled sullenly.

"I know my biz. If there's trouble I know how to stop it. Shall I go on?"

For a moment Pop hesitated.

Then he gulped down his uneasiness and said, shortly:

"Yes. If there is trouble, Jim Perkins, God forgive you, after all the kindness I've shown you."

Something in his words seemed to strike the elephant-trainer with a sense of remorse, for he answered, with an earnest respect he had not shown before for weeks:

"Before God, Pop, he's safe. I wouldn't give myself away. I can master him any time."

"Go on, then," said Pop; and he made the signal to Rabbetts, who was watching from the ring.

The stentorian professor roared:

"Professor Perkins, Emperor of the Tuskers, with his wonderful trained elephant, King Philip, will now go through his wonderful performance."

And with that the professor took a leap over the bank at the side of the ring, to get out of the way, as King Philip rushed into the center of the arena, with his trunk in the air, and stood there, trumpeting wildly, and looking round him at the people.

The next moment Jim leaped after him, and called out, sharply:

"Kneel, sir! kneel!"

King Philip heard the mandate, and, for the first time in months, refused to obey, backing away from his keeper.

Jim, with the reckless daring that distinguished him, instantly rushed in with his goad, shouting fiercely; drove the gigantic beast round the ring, prodding him all the time, while the people hushed their cries and stared at the contest, hardly knowing what to make of it, or whether there was real danger in the beast.

Some people on the bottom seats sprung up, and a woman fainted.

For several seconds it looked like a panic, and Pop turned pale.

Then King Philip yielded, stopped and fell on his knees; Jim made a bound to his foreleg and thence to his head, where he stood up erect, with the point of his long goad pressing into the elephant's skull, and looked round him with the air of a demi-god.

King Philip was subdued, and the people saw it and roared their approval.

The scary ones on the lower seats sat down, ashamed of themselves, and Jim Perkins slowly withdrew his goad and signaled the elephant to rise.

King Philip slowly and steadily rose up, and carried his conqueror on his head round the ring amid loud and enthusiastic applause, while Pop Hicks muttered to himself:

"By gum! he's a card, he is; a great card. If he'd *only* let whisky alone."

The elephant-trainer went on with his performance with the now subdued beast, and Pop Hicks breathed freer when he saw that King Philip had calmed down into quiet and obeyed orders promptly.

He was congratulating himself on it, when he felt some one touch his arm, and turning, saw a stranger by his side, a man of medium height, very stoutly built, with a frank, bold, handsome face.

Pop stared at him. The stranger was among his people behind the scenes, and he did not recognize him.

"Excuse me," said the stranger, in a low tone. "I'm Lion Charley Noble. You don't know me, perhaps—"

Pop instantly remembered him.

"Yes, yes; beg pardon. Glad to see you. Can I do anything for you?"

He supposed the other wanted a favor.

Lion Charley shook his head, and spoke low and rapidly:

"You're going to have trouble with that brute. I had him myself once, but he don't behave as he used to. Who took his chains off?"

"Jim Perkins," said Pop, a strange sensation, very like fear, at his heart.

Lion Charley looked grave.

"He ought not to have done it. He's a good trainer, I see; but the brute knows he's free. Get your horses out of the way. He mustn't come out of that ring in that condition."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Pop, more confused than ever.

Lion Charley began to tear off his clothes, showing a suit of tights under them, and speaking all the while.

"I'm going in to help Jim Perkins put on the chains, while he's in the glare of the lights. Tell your ringmaster to announce me, as a special favor from Mr. Bownse."

"But what will Bownse say?" asked Pop, hurriedly. "I'm grateful, very grateful to you; but—"

"But don't talk," answered Charley, sharply. "You're losing time. Tell the men to bring the chains. If he comes out into this dark among the horses, he'll just raise Old Scratch. Quick! Announce me!"

As he spoke, he kicked off his last bit of outer clothes, and ran to the entrance of the ring.

Pop ran out, and saw that Perkins had just thrown his somerset from King Philip's tusks, and was standing on the elephant's head for the final wheel round and salute.

He rushed out and shouted:

"Perkins! A moment!"

Perkins stopped, drove his goad into King Philip's head and stood up proudly, while the huge brute knelt.

Pop Hicks roared out:

"Ladies and gentlemen—we are about to give you a surprise and treat—not in the regular programme."

There was an instant hush of expectancy, and people strained their ears to hear what was coming next.

Pop Hicks continued:

"I have the pleasure to state that—Lion Charley—who once trained King Philip himself—by the kind permission of Mr. Bownse—has consented to appear for—this night only—to assist Professor Perkins—in the arduous task—of chaining a wild elephant—so that he cannot hurt a child. Lion Charley!"

Then came a roar of applause, as Lion Charley, with an active bound sprung into the ring in his crimson tights, and bowed to the audience; then advanced to King Philip, snapped his fingers, and called out sharply:

"Lie flat, sir!"

Down went King Philip's head between his fore feet instantly, and Jim Perkins slipped off his head and fell in the ring.

Then he leaped up and cried angrily:

"Who'n blazes are you, interferin' with my business? Get out of this ring! I'm runnin' King Philip."

His voice was loud enough to attract the attention of the people, and they began to get up again excitedly.

Lion Charley turned his head to call to Pop Hicks, guardedly:

"Bring the chains, quick! All the men you've got!"

To Jim Perkins he said:

"Be still, man; don't be a fool. He's got to be chained, or he'll smash things."

"And I say, by gosh, he *shan't* be chained," cried Jim savagely. "Get out of this ring, or by gosh, I'll set him at you."

Charley Noble folded his arms and stepped back a pace.

"Try it if you dare," he said.

Jim, furious with rage and whisky, turned to the elephant and shouted:

"UP AND SMASH HIM, PHILIP."

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLE BEHIND THE SCENES.

THE moment that Elephant Jim shouted to King Philip to rise, Lion Charley gave a spring in the air, dashed both heels into Perkins's chest, and sent him on his back close to the elephant's head.

It was done so quickly and with such ease that the people thought it part of the show, arranged for their benefit, and applauded loudly.

As for the elephant, it lay still where Lion Charley's mandate had couched it, head down between its fore legs, trunk flat on the ground, hind legs stretched out.

The animal's small, intelligent eye was fixed unwinkingly on Noble, and it never deigned to notice when the circus hands came running in to clank the chains close to its head.

Elephant Jim had been knocked down close to King Philip's head, and was stunned by the shock for several seconds.

When he arose again, the men were round the prostrate elephant, putting on the bands, and King Philip never moved or took his eye from the face of his old trainer, Lion Charley.

Perkins looked stupidly round him, and his dark face grew fairly livid with fury, but he did not offer to attack his rival again.

He remained standing apart till the chains were adjusted, when Lion Charley turned to him to say, peaceably:

"Mr. Perkins, I'm sorry you made me strike you, but you're not yourself to-night. I trained that elephant ten years ago, when I was a boy, and know his ways. If he hadn't been chained, he would have run amuck through the horses as soon as he got out of the glare of the lights. Will you take him out?"

Jim looked at him with an evil sneer.

"Them as took him from my hands kin take him out," he answered, sullenly. "I ain't no man's sucker. If you want to come into this show, you kin come; but I take King Philip

with me. I'll be even with you for this, Charley Noble."

Noble, for the first time, seemed at a loss what to do. There lay the elephant, and its owner refused to take it out, while Noble belonged to a rival show.

"Look here, Perkins," he said, coaxingly; "take him out. I don't want to hurt your name before the guys. Take him out, and if you're not satisfied, I'll fight you any time and place you say."

Jim scowled at him.

"Get out of the ring, then. I'm a-goin' to take off his chains. No man don't go to interferin' with my business. If you want me to take him out, I must do it my own way."

Then Noble looked at him very keenly; but Jim turned his eyes away. The lion-tamer compressed his lips.

"Very well," he said, shortly. "If it's that way you want to act, I'm done. You're no man, Jim Perkins, and I'll back my words whenever I meet you."

Then he turned to the elephant, snapped his fingers, and said:

"Get up, sir!"

As if under a spell, the lately unruly beast rose and lumbered out of the ring, followed by Lion Charley, while Jim sulkily stalked into the stables and began to put on his street clothing without noticing any one.

Pop Hicks had watched the whole scene with great anxiety. He saw that Jim was mortally offended, and the only thing that comforted him was that King Philip had come back quiet as a lamb, seeming to be perfectly happy in the hands of his former trainer.

Lion Charley took him to his box, and told the men to put on all the chains they had, and replant the anchor.

"He's quiet now," he said, "but as soon as I go he'll raise a muss, if that man out yonder won't do his work."

Pop Hicks came up to him to ask:

"What's the matter, Mr. Noble? No bad blood, I hope, between you and Jim."

Noble turned on him with flashing eyes, and pointed to Elephant Jim.

"The matter is that he's a *traitor*, and he knows it. He's *trying to ruin your show*. If I hadn't come in when I did, you'd have had such trouble as you never had in your life before, Mr. Hicks."

Jim Perkins, who was much sobered up by this time, uttered a hoarse laugh.

"It's a skin game, Pop, and don't you forget it. He's played ye for a sucker. King Philip's as quiet as a lamb, and the Noble has queered your show for ye to advertise his darned cats."

It was ingeniously put, and Pop looked coldly and suspiciously at the man to whom, a moment before, he had felt so much indebted for what he had done.

Lion Charley saw the look, understood it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," he said, coldly. "You'll see where you are in five minutes. I came in to do you a kindness. I'll just get out."

Without further words he began to put on his clothes, going out of sight of King Philip, and his words were verified before he had time fully to dress himself.

Jim Perkins kept aloof and walked sulkily out of the tent, so that the elephant saw neither of the keepers.

That moment it began to "weave" uneasily, to grumble and tug at its chains, till Pop Hicks called out peremptorily:

"Tell Jim Perkins to come in and look after his brute, or take it out of the show. I'm tired of his airs. Curse the beast! He's more trouble than he's worth."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when his daughter Sally came riding to the entrance to do her act, and King Philip, with a vicious scream, struck at Flirt with his trunk, causing the mare to bolt almost through the side of the tent.

The incident completed Pop's anger, and he fairly shouted out:

"Jim Perkins! You murdering wretch! Get out of my show and take your brute with you. I discharge you."

Jim, who was lighting a cigar outside, heard the noise and came in at once.

"What's the rumpus?" he asked, insolently.

"It's you," cried little Sally, angrily shaking her whip at him. "You're drunk, you great brute. Do you want to kill me? This is the second time your elephant has tried to strike me with his trunk."

"Then keep out of his way!" roared back Jim, insolently. "Jumping Jerusha and cream-colored crocodiles! Kin I run the hull show fur you darned women and yer meshes? Keep out of his way!"

Pop heard him and grew white as a sheet, while Lion Charley, who had just finished his dressing, laid his hand on the veteran's arm.

"Keep cool, Mr. Hicks!" he said, quietly.

"He wants to be discharged. That's all."

"Then by gosh he shall," growled Pop, in tones that showed how angry he was.

He strode up to Jim and pointed to the elephant, saying in a low voice:

"Take your brute out! I discharge you! Take him out now—at once—or, by the heavens above, I'll kill you both right here!"

There was something in the old man's intense passion that awed Jim Perkins, big and strong as he was.

"I didn't mean—" he began, sullenly.

"Not a word," answered Pop. "Go, sir, go!"

Jim tossed his head at that in defiance.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go, and you'll find out who's the paying card of your show when I'm gone. Good-night! Come on, ye old thief!"

He addressed the last words to King Philip, as he unfastened the chains that tied up the animal's hind legs and led it out.

At the door he turned and shook his fist.

"Now mind, all of ye!" he roared. "Arter this, your darned show don't have no luck. I'm a-goin' to git double your figgers in Bownse's, and don't you forget it. And as for Lion Charley, curse your skin, I'll be even with you yet for kickin' me when I was too drunk to fight straight. Bah! Go to blazes, all of ye!"

Vulgar and insolent to the last, he went off with his elephant, and quiet reigned over the show behind the scenes.

In front they knew nothing of the row that was going on, for the band was playing and Zoralina was just executing her famous trapeze act.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOVING THE SHOW.

POP HICKS looked rather blue the moment the excitement of his fight with Jim Perkins was over.

The manager overcame the father, and the old man whistled thoughtfully to himself, and even forgot all about his daughter Sally, who was just then riding into the ring to do her manege and jumping act.

He had lost a big attraction, and there was no denying it.

Moreover, things had turned out in such a way that his rival, Bownse, was going to get the largest amount of free advertising out of the affair.

"Of course Jim's going to Bownse," he thought, "and he'll have Lion Charley, too. I begin to believe it's a put-up job between them all to injure me and that this Noble's in it."

It was these thoughts that made him nod coldly, when Noble came to him to say good-by.

"Good-night, sir," the manager said, haughtily. "I hope you're satisfied with the way you've acted. You may call it business, but I don't, sir. I call it a mean, underhand way of doing business."

Noble looked at him in a sorrowful kind of way as he answered:

"I know it looks so, Mr. Hicks. I know it looks as if I'd put up a job to steal a card from you."

"I'm glad you *can* see it," retorted Pop, in his most sarcastic tones. "I suppose they'll raise your salary for the work."

The lion-tamer shook his head.

"On the contrary, sir," he answered, "I shall not only not take advantage of this matter, but I promise you one thing: If Mr. Bownse engages Perkins, after the way he has acted, I *leave his show!*"

Pop started and his face brightened, but the gleam faded away as he said:

"Yes, yes, that's all very well to talk; but I can't hold you to any such promise, and you know it. Besides, that would do me no good."

"Not if I come to you with my cages," the other returned, inquiringly. "I can't afford to be idle if I leave the other show."

Pop hesitated.

"You don't mean it? You wouldn't come to me? Not but what I'll admit you're a better card than Jim Perkins."

"Mr. Hicks," replied Noble, quietly, "I'm not hunting engagements, but I like fair play. You've been badly treated to-night, and I know who's at the bottom of it. It's not show business at all. It's crooked work. If Bownse engages Jim Perkins, after what has happened, I leave him at once and come to you if you'll pay the same. That's a fair offer, isn't it?"

Pop was unfeignedly surprised.

"It's a good offer, Mr. Noble, and I accept it, if you'll come at once. But how am I to know what to bill? What have you got of your own?"

"I own my cages—two of them—with four lions, a pair of tigers, another of leopards, and a tigress with cubs, not trained, in a third cage. I own the teams that draw them and all the paper you want."

Pop's eyes glistened.

"I'll take you at your own terms. When will you come?"

"As soon as I know they've taken Perkins; not a moment before. I can't serve them a mean trick because he serves you one."

The old showman shook his hand with cordiality and respect, saying:

"You're a good man to have, Mr. Noble, and if we come together I hope you'll have pleasant times in my show."

"I hope so too," returned the lion-tamer, and

somehow or other, he colored up and looked awkward. "Good-night!"

Then he went away, and Pop bethought himself of talking over the affair with Moone after his usual fashion; but Moone was in front attending to his business with the newspaper guys, and Pop had to forego his talk till the show was over and the people out.

Then he went outside to ask if any one had seen Jim Perkins, and found that the drunken trainer had taken his departure, bag and baggage, after he went outside, and had last been seen going off by the same road as that taken by the Bownse show, with King Philip stalking behind his wagon, frightening all the teams on the road, while the brute's brutal master was howling drunk again, with a bottle beside him.

"We're well rid of him, and make a good exchange," he told Moone, as soon as he saw the little agent. "Noble's a better card, anyway. What d'ye think, hey?"

Moone looked as imperturbable as usual.

"I think the fight's begun in earnest," he said. "Bownse has gone into partnership with a man called Stone, and they've got money. Elephant Jim wouldn't have acted as he did if he hadn't wanted you to release him from his contract. You shouldn't have done it. You've given him the whip hand."

"Whip hand be darned," snapped Pop. "Do you want me to let him kill my darter for the sake of his contract? I believe he meant to do it."

"That shows how little you watch," returned the small agent, coldly. "The man's dead-gone on your daughter when he's sober. Any one with half an eye could see it."

Pop was unfeignedly surprised.

"Elephant Jim! Sho! you're coddin' me. Why, he cussed her outrageous."

"That was because he was drunk. You mark my words, Jim Perkins is gone on Celestine, and you'll find it out."

Pop Hicks looked uncomfortable.

"How many more fellows is gone on Sally, I'd like to know?" he said, grimly.

"Any quantity," was the calm reply. "Noble for one, as I told you."

Pop laughed triumphantly.

"You're darnation cute, but not so cute as you think, young feller. It's Zoralina's his mash, and my darter's nothing to do with the hull affair."

Moone looked quietly amused.

"All right if you think so, Mr. Hicks. I suppose you've heard it takes two to make a bargain. Zoe's sweet on him, but he's not on her by a jugful, as you'll find out some day."

And so saying, Mr. Moone left his employer in a brown study, and went off to attend to his own affairs, while the vans were driving up to take away the tents, and the usual routine of moving the show was progressing.

Pop Hicks was very thoughtful that night. It was the first time he had begun to think seriously of the fact that his daughter had become a woman in years and feelings, while he had been so in the habit of thinking her a child that he had been blind to the passage of time.

Jim Perkins in love with his Sally? It seemed impossible in face of the man's brutality to her a short half-hour before, and yet Pop Hicks began to open his eyes as he recalled things.

He remembered Jim's words about not running the show for "women and their mashes," and it set him to thinking Lion Charley had taken the honors of the evening, and Sally had been looking on while Jim had been bitterly mortified.

"Pr'aps the guy was jealous," he said to himself. "That Moone's an all-fired sharp-eyed snoozer, and ain't apt to be mistook. And Noble's a reg'lar masher. I must kinder keep an eye on Sal."

Not that he suspected his daughter for an unkind word had never passed between them, and Pop could have trusted her with his life at any time.

"But gals is gals," the old showman said to himself, "and Sal ain't got no mother, and there's things gals don't like to tell a man, if he is their dad, so she kinder gabs with the other gals. I must see her and have a talk with her."

The old man got into his sleeping-van for the night, where he occupied an apartment in common with Professor Rabbetts and Tom Fowler, the "upper crust" of the show, so to speak, and soon forgot all his troubles in sleep.

His next station was Coalville, and he had dispatched Moone ahead to work the town before he came in, and find the drift of public opinion.

Moone was awake when every one else was asleep, which partly accounted for his general appearance of weariness, as he had to work hard for a small salary compared to his needs.

When the sun shone in on the van next morning, Pop Hicks rubbed his eyes and woke, when the first sound he heard, over the rumble of the wagons, was the scream of King Philip, never to be mistaken, and the old showman instantly jumped out of bed to see what was the matter, for the sound boded evil to him.

He looked out of the van window and saw that his column was entering the show-lot at

Coalville, and that Bownse's people had arrived ahead of him, had taken the best place, pitched their tents, and were already feeding their animals for the day's work.

King Philip in all his glory of seven-foot white tusks, with steel bands and chains shinir in the sun, stood in the midst of the open spa before the show-tent, fastened by the hind leg, to a stout hickory tree, a foot in diameter, and was trumpeting fiercely and trying to get loose, all alone in the center of a respectful circle of gazers.

Pop Hicks looked at him, and said to Rabbetts, very dryly:

"Professor, I ain't more'n half-sorry J Perkins left us last night. That brute gets mo dangerous every day."

The professor, in a red woolen night-cap over his bald poll, sat up in bed to answer emphatically:

"Mr. Hicks, sir—I am glad, sir, glad, glad, very glad, the cursed brute's gone. I began to feel nervous announcing him, sir, for fear of some terrible accident, sir, yes, some terrible, awful accident! It's as much as a man's life's worth, sir, to be in the ring with him, keeper or no keeper. I wish them joy of him. If Perkins gets on another spree in that show, the brute will clear everything."

"But suppose he comes at us?" said Pop, in rather an uneasy tone.

Rabbetts nodded his head vehemently.

"Then, sir, I believe in calling out the troops, sir, and shooting the cursed brute, sir—yes, shooting him, shooting him."

"I reckon you're right," said Pop; "and now I recollect they've got two companies of milishy in this town, Rabbetts. It might be a good move to invite 'em free. I wonder if Moone'll think of it?"

Rabbetts screwed up his face. He was jealous of Moone, and Pop knew it.

"Mr. Moone is a young man yet, and cannot, of course, be expected to remember or to know everything, Mr. Hicks," he said, coldly, but little Tom Fowler called out from his bed:

"You leave Moone alone, you old fraud. There's more brains in that guy than you ever thought of having. I'll bet he's done his work straight. Look at the notices we get. If we all did as well as Moone, this show would coin money."

"Speak for yourself, sir; yes, yes, speak for yourself, ha! ha!—yes—good—speak for yourself," retorted Rabbetts, loftily. "I knock under to no man in the ring, for real artistic work in the presentation of all the attractions. Eloquence, sir, eloquence rules the world—ha! good—very fine thought that! Eloquence—rules—the world."

Tom Fowler turned over back again in his corner with a grunt, muttering:

"Darned old bucket of slops! Go to blazes!"

Mr. Rabbetts affected not to notice the epithet, for he arose and followed Pop Hicks's example in dressing for the day.

When they sallied forth, the first person they saw was little Moone, pale and weary-looking as usual, coming up on foot.

"Well, Moone, what have you done?" asked Pop, to which Moone replied:

"The town's all right, but they're going to have a row, and I'm promised the soldiers."

CHAPTER XV.

LION CHARLEY'S GRIP.

MR. COLDEN A. STONE, dressed in exquisite taste, without any diamonds, in a black silk-faced frock coat, with pearl-gray trousers, a high hat, and kid gloves, stood at the door of the Leonard House, Coalville, about nine o'clock that morning, waiting for some one to come up the street.

In the billiard-room inside, surrounded by parasites, was the magnate of the town, owner of the house and half the ground on which Coalville was built, George Leonard, pale and languid as usual.

The virtuous pair had come to their own stamping-ground, and were waiting for the report of Mr. G. B. Bownse, their prime minister, to conduct the war on Pop Hicks's show.

Stone slapped his boot with his cane, and hummed a tune while he waited. He knew his time was coming.

Presently he saw the yellow road-cart coming up the street, and G. Bragan Bownse got out and came up the steps to meet him, wiping his forehead, and looking nervous and absent-minded, as he usually did.

He pretended not to see Stone till he very nearly tumbled into him, when he affected great surprise and joy.

"Why, Mr. Stone! My dear sir! I was just thinking of you. Happy to meet you."

Stone curled his lip.

"None of that. I've been in the business before. What news?"

Onion George smiled blandly, and looked up and down the street, as if searching for some one, then suddenly seized Stone's sleeve, and led him off to one side, to say:

"Perkins has come in. He's in our show, elephant and all. He raised his rumpus, and Pop discharged him. He can't find fault with me for taking him in, can he?"

Stone frowned, as he answered impatiently: "Find fault? Of course not. Will you put him on to-day?"

"I should smile," replied Onion George. "Why, the parade's forming now. It's a clean beat. But say—"

He suddenly stopped, as a quiet gentleman of medium size, with a handsome, resolute face, came out of the hotel from behind Stone, and said to the manager:

"Excuse me, Mr. Bownse. If you're not busy, I'd like a word with you."

Stone looked at the quiet gentleman, and recognized, to his surprise, Noble, the lion-tamer.

He held out his hand at once, smiling:

"Mr. Noble, I believe. Happy to see you. I didn't know you were here."

Noble smiled and bowed, but pretended not to see the offered hand, saying:

"I came in on the midnight Express from Pittsville station, sir. Will you excuse us a moment, while we talk?"

Stone looked at Onion George meaningly, and the manager, after a moment's hesitation, said awkwardly:

"I declare, I beg your pardon. Mr. Noble, Mr. Stone, my partner. You can say anything before him, Charley."

Noble showed no surprise, but spoke out at once to the point:

"Mr. Bownse, you know the terms of our engagement. It was made with you, and I hold you responsible for it; no one else. I contracted with you alone."

Bownse wiped his forehead, and smiled in his blandest manner.

"Why, certainly, Charley, that's all right. I'm good for it, ain't I?"

"I hope so, sir. One of our points was this: I was to be the principal card of the show, and no other animal men were to be engaged. Is that so?"

Bownse hesitated and began:

"Now, Charley, don't be unreasonable. You're safe enough for your money—"

"Pardon me; that's not the question," Noble interrupted him unceremoniously. "Business is business, George. Here I find that you've gone and stolen Elephant Jim from Mr. Hicks's show, and are going to put him on to-day. Is that so?"

Here Stone—very injudiciously—spoke:

"But what of that, sir, as long as you get your pay, Saturdays? That's all you gentlemen are after, isn't it?"

Noble turned his calm, resolute face on him, with the fixed stare he used in his lion cage, and Stone positively quailed before it, brave as he was.

"My dear sir," said the lion-tamer, in a peculiar, low tone, never moving his eyes, "my engagement is with Mr. Bownse; I am talking to Mr. Bownse; when I wish to converse with you, I'll address you."

Stone colored high, and stepped back a pace, his hand instinctively falling to his hip-pocket, but Noble never so much as noticed him, and turned again to the manager, resuming:

"Have you engaged Perkins or not?"

Bownse drew a deep breath.

"Well, yes, I have, Charley."

"Are you aware of what he did last night?"

"No, I'm not."

This was only half true, but not all a lie; for Elephant Jim had not been sober enough to tell a straight story yet.

"I'll tell you then. He got budgy* in show hours, let his beast loose when he knew it was ready to run amuck, and very nearly raised a panic among the guys. I happened to be there. I went to see a friend—"

"Oh!" interrupted Stone again, "to see a friend in the other show, hey? I suppose you call that honorable conduct? Want to sell out, I suppose?"

He had recovered his presence of mind, and felt mortified that he had let a man look him down so easily as he had.

Lion Charley turned round on him and favored him with another glance that he had great difficulty in sustaining.

"Look here, my friend," he said, very sweetly, "you seem very anxious to get into trouble with me. Is it your wish to have a difficulty or not?"

Stone looked down on him from a difference of several inches, for he was a six-footer, and answered:

"Upon my word, sir, I'm not particular about it. I've a right to speak, I hope."

Charley Noble smiled in a singular way, as he answered:

"I suppose you have, sir. I don't wish any difficulty with you. The best thing you can do is to shake hands and let us part friends. Put it there!"

Stone looked down on him with still more hauteur, answering:

"Thank you. I don't shake hands with every man I meet."

"But you'll shake hands with me," returned Noble, in the same tone, not moving his eyes from their steady unwinking stare. "That is,

unless you wish to have a difficulty. If you do, say so."

And, somehow, Stone put out his hand, his glance falling before the lion-tamer's eyes, spite of himself, as he said, awkwardly:

"Of course I don't wish trouble with any man, sir; especially when we are to be in the same show. There, take it, if you want to."

Lion Charley instantly grasped the extended hand, when Stone turned as white as a sheet and clinched his teeth hard to repress a scream. The grip of the shorter man was like a vise, and the stalwart six-footer fairly cringed with agony before the enormous strength displayed by the other, as Lion Charley said slowly:

"Of course not, sir; of course not. I am a peaceable—peaceable man; and have no time—no time—for quarrels—with men. I keep my fight for—my lions, my lions."

With each emphasized word he squeezed harder, till Stone fairly broke down, and uttered a cry of pain, trying to pull back his hand from the terrible grip.

Lion Charley smiled and relaxed his hold slightly, but retained the hand, as he went on blandly:

"Let me offer you a piece of advice, sir. Never run up against a man, before you know what he is made of; and never interfere in conversation between gentlemen. That's all."

He flung away the palsied hand, and continued to Bownse:

"Elephant Jim and I don't stay in the same show. You've broken your contract and I'm free. I take my cages away to-day. If he's a better card than I, keep him. Good-day!"

Bownse, in dismay, called out:

"But, Charley, for God's sake, don't be so hasty. You don't know—"

Lion Charley turned on him sternly:

"I do know. I join the Hicks show at once. If you want war, you shall have it, and to spare!"

And he walked away, leaving the two confederates staring blankly after him, till Stone said with a curse:

"Let him go. We've the miners yet to depend on, for a riot."

CHAPTER XVI.

COALVILLE.

THE town of Coalville was full of music and bright colors, as the two shows made their parade that day, before noon.

They had exchanged attractions; and the change, contrary to Stone's expectations, had been all in Pop Hicks's favor.

Elephant Jim was still shaky from his last night's spree and lacked his usual spirit, while King Philip was so full of vice that he had to be chained on all four legs, with his head tied down, before he was safe to be allowed to walk in the procession on any terms.

They had to give him a free space of nearly a hundred feet, for fear he would strike at the horses in the parade, and he frightened the spectators on the sidewalks, more than he attracted them, by his enormous size.

Even to Elephant Jim he began to display sullenness, and his trainer foresaw that he would probably be obliged to take him off work and "give him a lesson," unless he got milder.

As a matter of fact, King Philip was approaching one of those periodical fits of savage mania to which bull-elephants are liable, and it was a question whether the fit would come on at Coalville, or hold off for another day or two.

Stone and Leonard, in their dashing four-in-hand (Leonard's by the way, but generally driven by Stone, the owner not feeling confident of his abilities as a whip), took the pains to ride at the head of the Bownse parade, to impress on the people that they were the friends of that establishment; but they could not conceal from themselves that the elephant on whose capture they had built such hopes, was an injury more than a benefit to their cause, if they wished to hurt Pop Hicks.

And in the other parade, right at the head of everything, strode a figure that drew crowds wherever it went and attracted thunders of applause.

Lion Charley had joined Pop's show, cages and all, and instead of riding in the open car with his lion, had put a collar and chain on the beast, and led it along like a dog, while the lion behaved so quietly that the people had to be frequently warned not to press too close on him.

Lion Charley was the great feature of the show, and it was easy enough for him to keep his animal from the familiarity which breeds contempt, by occasionally inciting the beast to growl fiercely and utter one of his tremendous roars. Sultan, as he was named, had been taken when full-grown in Africa, had a grand voice, and was said to be the handsomest lion in the business, though he was about twenty years old, with some of his teeth gone.

For all that, he was imposing enough to attract every one's notice, and Lion Charley had him in perfect control.

When the parades were over, and the people were having dinner, Bownse came to Stone and Leonard, wiping his forehead in real agitation, exclaiming:

"Confound the luck, gentlemen, I'm afraid we're going to have trouble."

"What with?" asked Leonard, yawning. "You know I said I'd make good any loss. You needn't fret about that."

"No, it ain't that," said the manager, in still more agitation; "but we've got to give King Philip a lesson, Jim says, and it'll spoil a whole day, and we'll have to shut up the show."

"Shut up the show?" echoed Stone, angrily. "Confound it, man, have you sold out too to this Hicks?"

Bownse actually laughed at him.

"Well, Mr. Stone, excuse me, but you are green. How could I sell out to the man I'm trying to kill? No; but luck's against us in this town. Here are the gangs all ready to pour in, to see the new card, and the beast turns contrary. What are we to do?"

"Can't you get him out of the way?" asked Leonard.

Bownse stared at him.

"Get him out of the way? I wish to the heavens you'd tell me how to do that."

"Why not? what's the matter?" asked Leonard, as innocently as before.

"Matter? Well, I'll tell you. King Philip's on a regular tear, and they've got him fast to a hickory-tree. He can't tear that up; but it's about the only thing in the neighborhood he can't. He had to be coaxed there by Jim, while they tied him, and now he's ramping like all possessed, and Jim says he can't put off the lesson any longer. That's why he can't be moved."

"But what do you mean by a lesson?" asked Leonard fretfully. "Confound it, sir, I'm not in the show business and I don't understand you."

"I mean that he's got to be set on by all the hands and punished till he begs," said Bownse. "And that's going to take all the afternoon to do it."

Stone, who had been gnawing his nails and saying nothing, put in:

"Then the quicker it's done, the better. It will disturb the other show, won't it?"

Bownse shook his head.

"No; they're smart. They've taken the corner, way off, at t'other end of the lot, to be out of the reach of his nose; and there's a white fence between them and him."

"But won't they smash any fence?"

"I should smile."

"Then what protection is that?"

"Well, it's white. Elephants won't face white if they can help it. They're safe, if he don't break loose."

Stone leaned forward eagerly.

"But suppose he does break loose?"

Bownse looked scared.

"Oh, my good heavens, sir, you don't know what you're talking about. He'd run a muck through anything in the way."

Stone put his hand on Leonard's arm.

"George," he said, "we've got them."

Leonard looked stupid.

"Got whom?"

"These people. The elephant's got to get loose. If they want to catch the miners, (and they will in spite of your orders, if we don't give them a show) let 'em have them. We'll give King Philip his lesson while they're at it, and if he happens to break loose, it's not our fault."

Then he turned to Bownse.

"Isn't there a way to entice him to charge in any particular direction?"

Bownse, who was getting pale and nervous, fidgeted about uneasily, and said:

"Oh, my good heavens! gentlemen, that wouldn't do at all. Of course, there are ways!"

"What are they?" demanded Stone.

Bownse twisted about again.

"Oh, well—for instance—if a man really was mean enough—"

"Well, what could he do?"

"He could put a gray horse in the way, for instance. Philip hates 'em like poison. Slaps at any horse; but if it's a gray, he goes for him baldheaded."

Stone turned to Leonard coolly:

"You've got a gray saddle-horse, haven't you? If you want to have this thing straight, you'll have to risk something."

Leonard looked uneasy.

"Confound it, Colden," he said fretfully; "it's costing more than it's worth. Where's that thousand dollars you gave the elephant man?" If a thousand dollar horse is to go the same way, and we get no more good out of it than we have out of the first, I don't see why we mightn't just as well stop right here."

Stone looked at him in incredulous amazement. It was the first time the usually docile Leonard had to use a slang phrase, "kicked" against the expenditure of money.

"What are you afraid of?" asked the older reprobate, scornfully.

Leonard looked obstinate.

"I'm not going to send Gray Tom to be smashed up by that brute," he said. "What am I to gain by it?"

"Oh! I see," returned Stone, relieved. "I'll answer for it he don't hurt the horse. We'll put one of Bownse's men on him, and tell him to

*Budgy." Show term for drunk.

ride like the deuce as soon as King Philip breaks loose. "I'll see to that."

Leonard shook his head.

"Let them take one of the show horses, then. I'm not going to put my favorite in any such position."

Stone shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please; but you'd have to pay for him if he gets hurt."

"I'm willing to do that," returned Leonard, more placably. "As long as I see I'm getting something for my money, I'm willing to stand the racket."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DISTURBANCE.

THAT afternoon Pop Hicks opened his show and waited for the crowds that usually flocked in at Coalville.

He expected trouble from a riot, owing to enmity of the great man of the place, but the forethought of little Moone had provided for that.

The advance-agent had been to the mayor of the place, expressed his fears of trouble from the opposition to the show, and had secured the assistance of the sheriff and the two companies of local militia, as a *posse comitatus*, and an additional attraction.

For he had taken care to see the captains of the companies and persuade them that such a chance for a parade and a free show at the same time was not to be neglected.

So they had promised to come in, local band and all, in full uniform; and Pop was waiting to hear the music to open his show, when Lion Charley came to him to tell him:

"They're having trouble over at the other place. King Philip's on the tear, and they're trying to tie him down and burn him. He's right in front of their ticket-wagon, and they won't show this afternoon."

Pop rubbed his hands.

"So much the better for us; hey, Noble?"

"Perhaps," was the enigmatical reply, "and perhaps not."

"Hey, why not, why not? What d'ye mean sir, what d'ye mean?"

"Well, the beast's out in plain sight, and it'll be a free show," said Noble dryly. "You can trust Coalville to hang on to a free show every time, you know, and that will draw away from us."

"But I've got a fence up between us," said Pop. "I thought they'd come some games over us, and I moved over here on purpose."

"That's right," said Noble, "but I've got an idea, Mr. Hicks, that this lesson means trouble to us, or they'd have waited for the night to do it after everything was on the road."

Pop looked at him uneasily.

"You don't mean to say he's not tied securely do you?"

"That's just what I mean. The tree he has his chains round is but a small one, and if it *does* come up, there's going to be a scatterment. What's that band?"

"That's the Coalville Invincibles and the Coal County Guards," said Pop, proudly. "They're coming in uniform, and if they don't bring the people I've made a mistake in giving Moone full swing."

"Moone? Oh, yes, your advance-man. He is a good man, Mr. Hicks. I knew him in Morris & Brown's show. He does his work well. The soldiers are a good card, and we may want them if they're good for anything, though I don't believe much in soldiers."

Pop drew him close to whisper:

"They're to have twenty rounds of ball cartridge with them."

Noble looked surprised.

"What for?"

"In case of riot. Don't you know who owns all this town and half the county round?"

"No. I supposed—"

"I'll tell you. I don't trust to supposings."

Then Pop Hicks gave him a short history of the original trouble at Popokus where the dudes in the audience frightened Sally Hicks's mare Flirt and where the fight began in the dark.

Noble let him tell it; and expressed no opinion beyond:

"Well, that's all understandable, but the man at the head of this trouble is not the owner at all. The owner's called Leonard, a poor fool with more cash than brains. It's another man altogether, who's in with Bownse; a fellow called Stone. He's gone into partnership with Bownse and pretends to know all about show business."

"Stone, hey? Stone?" said Pop, thoughtfully. "What sort of a looking man?"

"Tall, large man, lots of diamonds; dyes his mustache, looks like a gambler."

"That's the man. The very dude who tried to draw a pistol and started the muss at Popokus. I thought he was Leonard."

"No. He's a friend of his, I've heard, but I never saw them together except in the parade, and then I didn't know Stone claimed to belong to the show."

Here the noise of the band came nearer and nearer, and they saw the head of the little procession coming up the street, attended by a great crowd.

Pop Hicks brightened up, and hastened to throw open the gates of the show, when the militiamen passed in free, and the silver began to rattle in on the glass plate of the ticket-wagon as the crowd pressed forward to get front seats in the show.

Pretty soon after, little Moone drove up, weary looking as usual, and started a little movement of his own, composed of a few riders and tumblers, with which he swooped down to Bownse's lot, and found a large crowd standing about vaguely contemplating the antics of King Philip, who was straining at his tree and looking the picture of fury, while the hands of Bownse's show were getting ready the ropes and chains to fasten him down.

Moone drove about in the crowd, and appeared at first to be looking at the preparations with interest. At last he said, in a loud tone, to one of his men:

"Those leg chains are giving way, Billy, ain't they? It looks so to me."

Billy, taking the cue, answered:

"By Jerushy, so they are! We'd better get out of this. They say he killed twenty people, at a lick, last season. He's a terror, he is. I'm glad he's out of our show."

Then Billy turned his horse, and Moone called out as he drove off:

"Come along, boys. That tree's not safe to hold much longer, and we'd better be out of the way when it comes."

The words had the effect he intended them to have. The people in the crowd began to saunter away, at first unwillingly; but, as the news spread and magnified, they began to run and very naturally followed the red-wheeled road-cart and circusmen into the grounds of the other show, which was divided from Bownse's concern by a screen of white painted canvas, that acted as a fence.

Once there, it was the most natural thing in the world for them to drift down toward the entrance, to stare at the big pictures, and when they got there, it was an easy job to entice them in.

When the hour arrived for opening, Pop Hicks rubbed his hands gleefully, and said to Moone:

"Squire, we've got 'em again. Luck's turned. We won't have no riot here and I'll bet on it. Look at the guys, sir. They're as happy as clams at high water."

Then he ordered on the entry, and the show proceeded swimmingly amid loud applause, till the time came for Noble to perform his lions.

Then when the great double cage was wheeled in, the spectators saw a fine sight, as the shutters were slammed down and the occupants of the cage were revealed. Two handsome lions, as many lionesses, a pair of grand royal tigers, and another of graceful spotted leopards, lay in an enormous cage, parted from each other by bars, each kind to itself; and into the ring sprung the lion-tamer, whip in hand, to bow to the people and ascend the steps to the cage door. Noble had already laid his hand on the latch, and was about to open the gate; the animals had reared themselves up, roaring, against the bars, in their usual savage-looking styles, growling and showing their teeth in premature resistance to their anticipated training; when a sudden noise outside the tent caused the man to stop and the beasts to drop on their feet and rush from side to side of the cage in frantic excitement.

The people half-rose in their seats turning pale, a deep hush fell on the tent; the wild beasts shook the iron bars as they leaped from side to side, and in the midst of all was heard, outside, the voice of a man, shrieking excitedly:

"Run! Run! The elephant's loose!"

Then came the savage trumpeting of King Philip, followed by an indescribable din inside the tent as the people sprung to their feet.

For a moment even Lion Charley turned pale; the next he left the cage and ran over to where the gayly-clad soldiers were sitting, with their muskets between their knees:

"Now, captain," he shouted, "let's see what your men are made of. Quiet this panic."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STOPPING A PANIC.

THE militiamen were not bad fellows, and for a wonder for militiamen, they seemed to be in fair discipline, for they had not stirred when the panic began, and their officers had had sense enough to jump up and sign them to keep their seats, which they did.

Pop Hicks and the professor, with all the hands, had run into the ring at the first sound outside, and were shouting to the people to "keep their seats—that there was no danger."

The band, with the presence of mind of men used to emergencies, struck up "Yankee Doodle," and for a moment the panic quieted down, as the strains of the band drowned the noise outside. Then Lion Charley ran over to Pop Hicks, signed to him that he was going out, and made a dash for the entrance.

Pop Hicks took advantage of the movement, and the curiosity that it excited, to howl:

"Ladies and gentlemen—Mr. Noble—has gone out—to drive off—the elephant.—Keep your seats—no danger—now."

Then, as the noise quieted down, he went over to the captain and said hurriedly to him:

"Can your men shoot?"

"Yes, yes—we're the champions in the State shoot," was the reply; but the captain's voice shook a little. "What do you want?"

"Take some of your men outside and help Lion Charley," said Pop. "He's all alone and, though he's a good man, I'm afraid he'll go under."

The captain was a young fellow with plenty of money, fond of a fine uniform; but he had pluck enough, so he said to his men, in a quick, decided voice:

"I want all the marksmen—no one else. We've got to go out and shoot the beast."

Nearly half the men rose, and Pop saw that each wore a little badge on his breast. They were all quiet-looking fellows, and they fell in and marched out without any fuss, while Pop continued to the audience, to keep them quiet:

"Ladies and gentlemen—this tent—is the only safe place around. Mr. Noble and the soldiers—will keep you—safe, and the elephant *won't dare to charge this tent!* Keep your seats till he comes back—and in the mean time—we'll go on with the next act, till Noble comes. Wheel off the cage, boys. We must apologize for the trouble—but it's only an accident—owing to the people of the *other show* not knowing how to handle King Philip. We never had any trouble with him."

So he kept on talking, while the men were wheeling back the lion-cage, more to keep the people quiet than because he believed what he said; for all the time he could hear the shrill trumpeting of the enraged elephant outside, with the crashing of woodwork and the shouts of excited men, that told that a heavy contest was going on.

Only the discipline and coolness of his men, with his own nerve and stentorian lungs, enabled him to hold the people in their seats, where no one pretended to take any more interest in the show; where mothers hugged their children close to them in terror; where girls fainted, and men sat trembling, not knowing what to do, and boys were slipping off under seats, with the usual ignorant recklessness of their class, to sneak out and find what was the matter.

At last Pop could stand it no longer, and he called to Rabbetts, to whom he said in a low, hurried tone:

"I'm shouted out. Keep them still a while, and I'll go out to see what's the matter."

The professor took his place in the speaking against time, and no man was better calculated to do it; for he repeated everything he said two or three times, and got the people laughing at his pompous manner so that they almost forgot what was going on outside, spite of the noise, till every one was startled out of his seat by the rattle of a volley of musketry close to the tent, followed by a loud yell.

A moment later Pop Hicks rushed into the ring, radiant and ruddy, to shout:

"It's all safe!"

No better could have been said, and the people quieted instantly to listen, while he continued:

"Your own soldiers have behaved nobly! The infuriated monster was charging directly for this tent, when they gave him a volley, under direction of Mr. Noble, and King Philip turned and ran away!"

All this, word by word, at the full power of his lungs, and he capped it with a joke.

"I—hope—Mr.—Bownse—will—have—a—g—o—o—o—d—time—catching—him!"

Pause for breath.

"He's—gone—for—Deacon—Smith's—BARN!"

Deacon Smith's barn was a well-known place and the deacon was known as a penurious and grasping man; so the people laughed a little and Pop ended:

"Mr.—Noble—turned him—first—and now—will perform—his *lions!* He's—good—for any—beast—ever—WORE—HAIR!"

He closed with a hoarse shout, and then broke down and backed out, as Charley Noble walked back into the ring, followed by the militiamen and bustled about crying:

"Where's Moone?"

"Here," replied a quiet voice, and there was the little man under a lamp, with a book of loose leaves on his knee, in which he was writing rapidly.

He did not even look up as he answered, but kept on scribbling.

Pop bustled up to ask:

"Well, Moone, well, well, where were you all the time? Didn't see ye. What are ye doing, hey? hey?"

Moone calmly continued his work.

"Don't—bother me—please—I'm busy—" he said, between words.

"But what are you doing, hey?"

"Writing up—the racket—worth a good two columns—any paper—don't talk."

And he scribbled away while Pop looked on in awe, till Moone interjected:

"Get it into—*Sentinel*—half an hour—go to press—at—four. There."

As he spoke, he finished with a dash of his pencil, and sprung up.

"See you again in half an hour. Can't miss."

the paper. It belongs to Leonard; but I know the editor," he said hastily. "I'll get it in before he gets his orders not to mention it. Good-by."

The small man darted away out of the tent, jumped into the red road-cart, and drove away full speed to the *Sentinel* office, into which he rushed, to the surprise of the editor, who was up to his nose in proofs, as he looked up.

"Why, Moone," he said cordially, "what's the matter?"

"Matter? Why, Johnson, do you call this a live paper, and don't know the news? Bownse's elephant got loose, and he's off over the country breaking things, and your company here—the Guards and Invincibles—had to give him a volley. Here it is, all up for you—true, on my sacred word. It *must* go in if you have to hold the paper for it."

The editor seized the MS. and glanced over it rapidly, humming to himself.

Then he turned sharply.

"What show's this for, Moone? The Hicks? I can't put it in if it is. Can't help if it sells ten thousand copies. *Daren't*. I'd lose my place. I don't own the paper. It's Leonard's, and he's given orders not to mention you."

Moone tossed his head scornfully.

"Look through it if you like. I've not said a word about our show. It's not mentioned once; it's Bownse all through."

The editor looked again and scanned every line for the name "Hicks;" but, as it seemed to be no where, he finally said:

"Well, it shall go in. We've about ten minutes left."

Then he rushed into the printing-room, and drove the foreman almost into a fit of apoplexy by telling him that the article Moone had written *MUST* go in if he had to cut it up in fifty pieces to do it in time.

Moone remained in the office till he saw the galley proved and the forms in the press, when he picked off the first paper that came out, and dashed off to the show with it, in the red road-cart.

That evening Coalville read to itself, in great indignation, the following article:

"AN ELEPHANT ON THE RAMPAGE."

"Our citizens will be astounded to hear that a real wild elephant, as vicious as they make them, is at large in Coal county. It got loose, this afternoon, from the Bownse show, as the men were trying to throw it, to administer discipline, in the brutal style peculiar to elephant-tamers of the second class. The agonized animal, maddened by the red-hot irons with which they were searing its trunk, broke loose from its fastenings and charged in the direction of a rival show, in which happened to be at the time our local companies, the Guards and Invincibles, who, with the promptitude of soldiers, headed by Lion Charley Noble, sallied out to resist the assault and defend the helpless women and children behind them. Thanks to the skill and courage of Lion Charley, who first faced the monster single-handed, and to the marksmanship of the Guards, under Captain Spicer, who poured a volley into the animal's head, the charge was turned and the wounded brute rushed off in the direction of Deacon Smith's barn, where it will probably take to the woods and do much damage."

"Too much blame can hardly attach to the carelessness or incompetency of the men who made such an accident possible. If any deaths occur, they will rest at the door of the show-people who undertake to handle elephants without knowing how to do it."

"There," said Pop Hicks, as he folded up the paper. "I didn't think they'd put it in but they have. What'll ye do with this?"

Moone grinned wearily.

"Put it into every paper in the State as an ad., with the heading 'What Coalville says about G. B. Bownse's Show.' I'll advertise him with a vengeance. But I say, sir?"

"What, Moone?"

"We ought to buy King Philip cheap now. Jim Perkins got hurt."

Pop started and looked admiringly at his small lieutenant.

"Well, you *are* a deep little guy. So we can, so we can, and give Bownse fits too, hey, hey, hey? Wouldn't it be a joke?"

CHAPTER XIX.

KING PHILIP ON A TEAR.

EARLY next morning a party of men, with pitchforks, goads, ropes and chains, set out to undertake the recapture of King Philip, the wild and runaway elephant who had given so much trouble.

Elephant Jim, with his arm in a sling, a scowl of mingled mortification and pain on his dark face, rode at the head of the party in Bownse's yellow dog-cart, driven by no less a person than Mr. Bownse himself, while Stone rode on horseback among the other men, and seemed to be giving directions.

For Elephant Jim had actually lost his grip on King Philip at last.

As the maddened brute rushed away, when he first broke loose, he had sent Jim flying with a side kick, in the confusion.

"No, I'll bet he didn't see me," Jim was saying, in a lachrymose tone, to the manager,

as they drove on. "He never would ha' done it if he'd see'd me to know me. It was them galoots as started in to burn him on their own hook as made the hull rumpus. I'd like to know who give 'em leave afore I come. I'd fix him."

Bownse said nothing to irritate him, for he was more than half-afraid of Elephant Jim, but he winked over at Stone, who was the party in question, and Stone observed, haughtily:

"If you want to know who told the men to do it, I did. I believe I have a right to do as I please in this show."

Jim turned his dark face round on the gambler with a singular look.

"It was you, was it?" he said.

"Yes, it was me," was the bold reply.

"And if you had been sober instead of lying round like a drunken brute, we shouldn't have had the trouble. It's *your* fault; no one else's. You let the beast get out of control, and he had to have his lesson—"

"Yes, and a blaze of a lesson you made of it," returned Jim, in a tone of concentrated scorn. "You'd make a blank of a animal man, you would. All right, mister; if you're so durned smart, go and take King Philip now, and I'll go home."

Then a bitter scowl of rage contorted his features, as he shook his fist at Stone, crying out:

"Gosh darn yer picter, here I be with a broken arm, and you're hull and sound, and I'll bet my life King Philip 'll knuckle down to me before he will to you and all the rest, with yer pitchforks and chains."

Stone was about to make a hot reply, when Mr. Bownse said soothingly:

"There, there, what's the use of disputing like two old women? What's done can't be helped. Luckily he didn't hurt our show, and he skeered old Hicks's folks nigh out of their lives. They had to get a man out of our show and a lot of soldiers to drive him off, and he smashed five big wagons for 'em at that. We'll get him back, Jim, and you'll perform him next town, too, or it'll be funny. Elephant Jims ain't hangin' on every bush, are they, Jim?"

Jim's exorbitant vanity cooled down at the compliment, and he said, more mildly than he had spoken:

"I ain't sayin' it warn't my fault. I'd no business to get budgy. But I do say if I'd taken the job first off, the old thief would never have got off. Think I don't know my biz?"

"If you had," interjected Stone, in his usual sarcastic tones, "you'd never have let him get so wild."

Elephant Jim gave him a furtive glance, very unlike that of Lion Charley, but just as dangerous, and said, slowly:

"All right, mister, all right. My arm's broke, but there's a bone in it yet, and you'll find that out some day."

Stone eyed him fiercely.

"What do you mean? Do you suppose I'm afraid of you?"

Jim laughed a short, dry laugh.

"All right, mister, we'll see some time. Mebbe the arm ain't broke as bad as some think it."

Stone laughed back at him.

"I know that well enough. I've seen plenty of gentry of your kind, and laid them out, too. Sick or well, you can't cow me, my friend. I'm no brute, but a man. Now, shut up your head."

As he spoke, he threw back his coat, put his hand to his hip, and eyed Jim fearlessly, adding:

"I've had enough of your drunken insolence, my man. I come from California, where it's put up or shut up. Which is it with you?"

Jim eyed him in the same sidelong way as before, and answered slowly:

"It's git out and go home and leave you to get King Philip, if you want to pick any more musses with an unarmed man. If you're so darned brave, go on and get him. I'll go home."

Stone saw the folly of resenting anything Jim said, so he flapped his coat to again, and said, with a curl of the lip:

"All right. I suppose you fellows must have your way. You can settle it any time you please."

Jim laughed again, his peculiar, short, dry laugh, as he retorted:

"A bargain's a bargain. We'll see, some day or other. There's King Philip ahead of us. Now let's see ye ketch him with yer pistols, my solid guy."

About a quarter of a mile ahead of them, in a field of green corn, they could see the gigantic bulk of the runaway elephant, as he gathered the green stalks up in his trunk and feasted on their sweets.

The men came to a halt, and Bownse said to Jim:

"Now, then, take command. You know what to do. We don't."

Jim shrugged his shoulders and motioned toward Stone with his head.

"He's sich a fly guy, set *him* at it. He knows all about elephants, he does. Let him ketch him. I ain't no good."

Stone bit his lip.

He had plenty of courage; but the sight of the elephant in the field cooled his ardor considerably.

He took out an opera-glass and surveyed King Philip carefully.

In truth the elephant did not look like a pleasant subject to handle.

His head and body were covered with little streams of blood which had dried on him, where he had received the volley of the militiamen.

To him the leaden bullets had done no more harm than a charge of small shot to a cow. They had scared him off at first, but that was all.

His life lay too deep for anything short of a big bore rifle at close quarters, aimed at head or heart.

And as he was an African elephant, with a convex forehead, with a brain invulnerable except from the front, King Philip looked like an ugly customer to handle.

Therefore, Stone put down the glass, and tried to say, indifferently:

"It's none of my business. I don't own the elephant—you do."

Jim smiled as he sat in the cart.

"Will ye do as you're told, then?"

Stone hesitated.

"Yes, if you promise not to put up a job on me, to make that brute pay me your spite."

Jim smiled again.

"Ye needn't be afeard. I ain't that sort. I pays my *own* debts. I wouldn't let him hurt ye for his price. If you want to get him we've got to get him outer that field, and he won't come unless he's coaxed. You've got a good hoss. Ride in and holler at him, then turn and run like blazes, so he'll foller ye. Don't go too fast, or he'll give up. Dare ye do that, or shall I send one of the boys?"

His tone was so sneering that Stone was stung into saying:

"I dare do anything you do!"

Jim's eyes flashed fire.

"Ye do, do ye? We'll see about that?"

He jumped out of the cart, suppressing the grimace of pain the action caused to his injured arm, which was not broken after all, but very severely bruised, and went to the side of the road.

The field in which King Philip was feeding was separated from the road by two others; but the stout rail fence had been leveled by the monster as he made his way to the corn-patch, and lay in ruins where he had passed.

"You, Billy Harkins," said Jim to one of the men, who was a leaper in the ring, "are you game to put on a rope?"

Billy nodded quietly, and another man answered with him:

"I'll help him, Jim. I've done it afore."

Jim nodded as if satisfied.

"You'll do. Now, Mr. Stone, let's see if you're as good stuff as you make out to be. You see that tree?"

He pointed to a large apple tree a good two feet in diameter at the ground, and continued:

"We've got to get Philip tied to that tree. If you are the man you say you are, lead him right under it, and we'll do the rest. Dare ye do it?"

Stone had turned pale, but he suppressed his natural tremor, and answered, haughtily:

"I am ready. Tell me how to proceed."

Jim looked at him curiously, and with a certain respect he had not hitherto shown.

"Remember," he said, "this is no fool of

a job. If he catches you, salt won't save you, and if you run too fast he won't come to the tree. He's got to be led to that tree, and close to it, *somehow*. If ye miss it the first time, coax him on again. That's your biz, to coax him to that tree."

"And what's yours?" asked Stone, a little sarcastically. "To look on?"

Jim smiled as he answered:

"You'll see. We've got to *catch* him and *tie* him. Billy Harkins will take your job, and you kin take his'n, if you feel you kin do it."

"And what's Billy's job?" asked Stone, for he began to feel curious.

"To put a rope around King Philip's hind-leg as he passes, and get out of the way afore he gets killed," was the composed answer. "Do you want it?"

Stone looked at Jim and shook his head. He began to realize that he had underrated these quiet circus men, but the way in which they went at their work spurred him to do his best.

"No," he said, frankly, "I'm not able to do it, and I beg your pardon, Perkins, for my sneers. I'll do my best. Are you ready?"

Jim held out his hand with a grim smile.

"Shake, pardner," he said. "No malice if you do your dooty like a man."

Stone nerved himself for the grip, with the memory of Lion Charley's terrible paw; but he soon found that Jim, with all his big, bony frame, was by no means as strong as the terrible lion-tamer, besides which he had time to set his muscles to resist the pressure successfully.

Then Jim turned to his helpers.

"Come to the tree, boys. Bownsee, get the cart out of the way. The rest of you be ready, when he's noosed, with the ropes and tackles. Now, Mr. Stone, go for him and coax him out."

Brave to desperation, as Stone generally was, his heart beat more strogly than usual as he galloped down to meet King Philip. The elephant lifted his head the moment he saw him coming.

CHAPTER XX.

CATCHING AN ELEPHANT.

STONE rode on cautiously, crossing the first field, till he came to the gap in the fence where King Philip had passed.

He was, as usual, riding one of Leonard's horses, the identical Gray Tom that the young millionaire had refused to lend in the morning.

Gray Tom was a thousand-dollar animal, Kentucky bred, a steeple-chaser by training, and generally docile and quiet.

As he neared the elephant, however, he began to exhibit restiveness, and Stone had difficulty in getting him into the last field.

The gambler got angry, dashed his spurs savagely, and succeeded in getting Gray Tom within a hundred yards of King Philip, rearing, bolting and plunging all the way.

The moment the elephant uttered a shrill scream of rage and charged, Gray Tom wheeled round, took the check of the curb between his teeth and bolted at full speed up the field, but away from the gap.

Stone sawed at his head in vain, for the horse was frantic with terror. He could not even get Gray Tom's head up before he came to the next fence.

Consequently the horse chested the barrier, broke several rails, and came over on his head, throwing his rider, cutting his own knees, scrambling up wild with terror, and galloping away with a shrill neigh.

The only redeeming point of his rush was that it was made with such speed that it distanced King Philip, who gave up the chase in disgust and returned to his cornfield to resume his meal.

For some moments Stone lay where he had fallen, too stunned to move.

Then he lifted his head and found himself alone, with a single fence between him and the angry elephant.

He had had enough of it for one day, and began to crawl away, when he heard a loud burst of ironical yelling from the circus men, under the tree, and saw Billy Harkins running out, waving a red cloth and screaming to provoke the elephant to another charge.

But King Philip seemed entirely willing

to stay where he was, and could not be coaxed out of the cornfield.

He answered Billy's yell with one of his shrill screams, but made no motion to leave the place, and Stone began to wonder what was to come of it all, when he heard the hoofs of a galloping horse on the road, and looked up, to see a well-known figure, on a chestnut mare, coming down the road from Coalville.

It was Sally Hicks out for a ride to give Flirt a little exercise, and he saw the little girl pull up as soon as she spied King Philip.

Then Jim Perkins ran out, and Stone heard the elephant-trainer shout:

"Sally! oh, Sally! Come here!"

"Who's there?" called out the girl, in her clear, loud tones.

"It's me—Jim," roared Perkins. "We want a coxer to get Philip out. Will you ride in and do it for us? Get him under the tree for us, that's all."

Stone held his breath to catch her answer, and heard her scream:

"You don't deserve it, you great brute. Didn't you let him near kill me?"

"Ah! don't leave us, Sally," called out Elephant Jim, pleadingly. "I was budgy. I didn't know what I was doin'. I swear I didn't. Do help us, that's a good gal."

"Why don't you get some of your own men, then?" cried Sally, riding closer. "You're a healthy lot of guys, you are—can't get a coxer out of your own show. How do you expect to cut us out of our route if you can't do any better than that? Why did you let him get out?"

"I didn't, Sally, I swear it," protested Jim. "It was one of them solid guys out in Coalville thought he could manage the king, and tried to punish him afore I came. Lordy, you should ha' seen him jest now, tryin' to coax the elephant. The hoss jest sent him a-kitin', I tell you, and he's over in one of them fields, a-pickin' up his own bones, I reckon."

Stone ground his teeth with shame and fury, as he heard himself thus frankly criticised, and sunk down in the long grass, hoping to be unseen.

But the quick-eyed circus men had seen him when he fell, and he heard Bill Harkins say:

"There he is, Miss Celestine, over in the timothy, tryin' to hide. He jest took as pretty a tumble as ever you see."

"Was the poor man hurt?" asked Sally, reprovingly. "You men ought to remember that he ain't trained, as we are."

"Then why did the guy want to be so darned fresh?" retorted Billy. "He put on more airs than a country stud-horse, and be gosh-blamed to him."

"But you'll help us, Sally, won't ye?" Elephant Jim urged again. "Tain't much for you. Flirt ain't afraid."

"Flirt afraid?" echoed Sally, scornfully.

"No, nor I, neither, and you know that, Jim. But look here, if I coax him for ye, Moone will just give you rats in the papers, after the way you left us in the lurch."

Jim seemed to be hesitating, and at last he said, openly:

"Let him. I don't blame him. I'd orter b'en kicked for gittin' budgy, and Pop Hicks is the best man I ever was with. Darned if I ain't sorry I ever left him, and I wouldn't ha' done it if it hadn't b'en for that crooked guy over there in the hay-field. He give me a thousand dollars to break my contract, and I don't care a darn who knows it. I'm a fool, and deserve to ketch it. Let the little guy say what he wants. Only you help me to-day, Sally, and you'll find out Jim Perkins ain't as bad as some folks thinks he is."

Sally turned her horse instantly.

"Very well," she said; "I'll coax him for you; and, mind you, Elephant Jim, I'll hold you to your promise some day if ever you let King Philip start a muss as he did to-day."

"You shall, Sally—you shall," was the earnest reply; and with that the little woman galloped boldly toward the field where King Philip was still feeding.

Stone felt his heart beating again like a trip-hammer.

A girl was going to execute a task in which he had nearly lost his life and failed ignominiously.

And she went about it as coolly as if she were doing her act in the ring.

She jumped Flirt over the gap in the fence, and cantered straight toward the elephant, calling out loudly to the beast.

King Philip went on feeding as if he did not notice her till Flirt came within less than fifty yards, when he suddenly wheeled round and came at her, open-mouthed, roaring savagely.

In the same moment Flirt wheeled and galloped away, seeming in no particular hurry, while Philip strained every nerve to catch her.

The little mare had dodged his trunk too many times to fear him.

Sally kept looking back and pulling at her horse, till Stone felt sick at his stomach at the frightful peril, as it seemed to him, of the girl.

The extended trunk of King Philip seemed to be almost touching Flirt's tail as they neared the gap, and the monster chased the mare fiercely right under the apple-tree, where the circus men were now crouching.

Stone saw King Philip pass the tree—saw a man dart out and come close to the beast's hind leg, which he seemed to clutch with both arms as he ran.

The next instant the man jumped back. Stone saw a black line, that stretched from the elephant's hind leg to the foot of the tree, and then there was a crashing and shaking of foliage, as the great tree bent over under the tremendous strain.

And then—King Philip sprawled on the ground with a crash, and a dozen men set on him at once.

With a desperate daring and skill that amazed the gambler, they flung themselves on the struggling beast and noosed leg after leg, then ran away with the lines to the old trees that studded the pasture-field, and had King Philip stretched out, flat on all-fours, in less than half an hour of vigorous and wonderfully skillful work.

And in all the affair little Sally and Flirt kept playing in front of Philip, coaxing him to exert himself and stretch his own cords tighter, till the great beast lay helpless as a log.

Then Jim Perkins, whose one hand had been busy all through the affair, called out to Stone:

"Come on here, Mr. Stone. You want to know how to punish a crazy elephant. Elephant Jim's the boy to show you, and don't you forget it, nuther. Come on. No one won't hurt ye. You did as well as ye knowed how, and no man can't do no more."

"Come on," called Billy Harkins. "May as well learn how to do things, if you're goin' to b'long to our show, mister."

And finally little Sally rode up, in her free and independent manner, to say:

"Come on, stranger. He's tied now and no harm done. He'll be quiet enough when Jim gets through with him. Don't be afraid. I'll take care of you."

Stone had had, in the course of his life, many mortifying episodes, like most men, but he never had felt so utterly sick with anger and shame as when he heard himself addressed in this patronizing tone, by this little girl who looked on him with a certain pitying scorn that cut him to the heart, in his vanity.

"No, thank you," he answered, stiffly. "I've no wish to see it. Good-day."

And he turned to walk away, when Sally called after him in her slangy way:

"Ta, ta! Leave us a lock of your hair before you go. What a masher you would be if you only knew how to ride."

CHAPTER XXI.

KING PHILIP BEGS.

THE mortified gambler had not very far to go across the fields before he found Gray Tom, who had recovered from his panic when he no longer saw the elephant, feeding quietly in a cornfield, where the tall green stalks hid him from view from the road.

The sight was a welcome one to Stone, who had no wish to add to his many mortifications that of entering Coalville on foot, when he had left it mounted.

He approached the horse cautiously and succeeded in getting hold of the bridle, when he examined Gray Tom.

The horse was bleeding from a cut in the

chest, and had both knees bruised and slightly gashed, but did not seem to be going lame at all, and, when Stone mounted him, moved off readily, and appeared disposed to run again from nervous excitement.

But the gambler, mounted, with his hat straightened out and his clothing dusted, felt like a new man from the battered Stone who had been rallied so unmercifully on foot.

He made up his mind to go back and witness the punishment of King Philip, if he could get Tom to face the elephant, and accordingly he leaped the few fences to the road, and went back to the field where the circus men were gathered.

An idea had come into his head. He would get even with some of them, and especially with the saucy little minx who had dared to mock at him with her show slang.

He saw them all gathered in the field, and Sally Hicks still sat on Flirt, not twenty feet from the elephant's head, watching the operation with tranquillity.

King Philip was trumpeting defiance, and struggling frantically to burst the tough cables that stretched him out, while Jim Perkins stood by a little furnace of the tinker's pattern, which was smoking away, and in which stood several long, wooden-handled irons to be heated.

Elephant Jim looked up as Stone rode in, and nodded familiarly.

"Hello, Stone, back again? Thought the hoss was too much for ye."

"Thank you," returned Stone loftily. "I never found that sort of a horse yet. He chested the fence or I wouldn't have had any trouble."

Sally looked at him with her saucy smile, as she observed:

"I guess you ain't used to riding much, are you?"

Stone flushed crimson.

"Thank you," he answered, "I've ridden a good deal in my life. I don't think much of ring riding. It's all show. Nothing so very difficult about it that I see."

And then he stopped short, as he saw that all the men were snickering at him, while Jim Perkins said in his grim way:

"Hem! Horse's knees looks like you was a bully rider. Next act, boys!"

So saying the elephant-trainer drew a pair of irons from the fire, and went straight toward King Philip's head.

The entangled monster saw him coming and slapped viciously at him with its trunk, which was still free.

Jim held out the glowing irons to receive the blow, saying savagely:

"Would ye, ye old thief?"

There was a hissing sound, and the agonized elephant struggled vehemently, trumpeting defiance, but unable to bear the pain.

The seared trunk was whipped out of the way, and Jim ran in close to the animal's eyes, burning with the irons and scolding all the while with a torrent of blasphemous objurgation.

Stone turned pale at the sight and sounds, as the punishment continued, and Gray Tom bolted and plunged, shaking in every limb, while King Philip resisted for a good half hour, at times nearly bursting the great cables that bound him to the trees, trumpeting savagely, striking with his trunk at everything in the way, but still harassed by the relentless Jim with fresh irons, and growing weaker and weaker.

Stone at last got his horse to stand within fifty yards, and could not contain his amazement at the coolness of Sally and her little mare.

They stood within a few feet of the radius of the wildly lashing trunk, and Sally did not seem in the least excited over the contest, occasionally dropping a word, such as:

"He's weakening, Jim! Give it to him! Don't let him beat you!"

And so the contest continued of man's determination and subtlety against the wild rage of brute force, till at last Philip stretched out his trunk and lay mute and still.

"Fresh irons!" was the merciless order of Jim, and straight at King Philip's head he went again, burning away with savage determination, the tough hide hissing with a sickening odor, till at last the prostrate elephant uttered a low, whining noise, which rose to a scream of mortal agony as it quiv-

ered through its whole vast bulk, but never offered to fight. The moment the sound was heard, Sally clapped her hands and cried:

"That's enough, Jim! He begs!"

Jim laughed aloud in a proud and triumphant way as he threw down his irons, and set his foot on King Philip's head.

"Aha, ye old thief!" he cried. "Have ye found your master again? Hey? Let's see if you're tamed yet?"

He walked all over the prostrate monster, took up the end of its trunk, slapped it with his open hand, and let it drop again.

King Philip never offered to stir.

Then Jim turned proudly to his men:

"He's had enough," he said. "Let him up. He won't give no more trouble this season, and he's a better card than ever."

Then to Stone he cried:

"Bring up your gray hoss! If he stands that, he'll stand anything."

Stone, by dint of much spurring, got Gray Tom within a few feet of the elephant, and finally succeeded in riding round King Philip.

And the elephant never stirred while they were taking off the ropes.

It lay there, completely conquered, while Jim passed about body and legs, striking them everywhere with his open palm, and at last called out:

"Get up, ye old thief! Get up!"

Then the great beast rose up slowly, and stood before its master, while Gray Tom made a frantic bolt again and tried to run away, but this time was checked by Stone so well that Sally called to him:

"Well done, sir. You're improving. Take a few lessons in the ring, and you'll know how to ride after a while."

Then she turned Flirt, and waved her hand to Jim, saying gayly:

"Good-by, Jim. He's all right, now."

"Thanks to you, Miss Sally," Jim called out very earnestly, taking off his hat and executing a profound bow.

Sally kissed her hand and galloped away on her ride from Coalville, when Stone seemed to make up his mind what to do, and dashed after her.

She never heeded the sound of hoofs till he was close behind her, when she waved her hand and called:

"Want a riding lesson? I'll give you one. Come on for a race."

Then she sat down in the saddle, spoke to Flirt, and away went the little mare like an arrow from the bow, with Gray Tom thundering after her.

Stone was, as he had boasted, a California rider, and understood his business; but he had never ridden Gray Tom till that day, and did not know the ways of his horse as fully as he could have desired.

Gray Tom was a "rusher," and had the trick of getting the check of a straight curb in his teeth when he ran away.

Stone managed to catch up with little Flirt in a race of something over a mile, when Sally put on her whip and suddenly turned and darted down a side-lane so quickly that Gray Tom was thrown out, and the mare had gained fifty yards before he could get into the lane.

Stone had hardly any definite idea in first chasing the girl, but now he ground his teeth, for she turned in her saddle, waved her whip and called out to him tauntingly:

"You can't ride for sour apples! Bet you can't catch Flirt for stamps!"

"We'll see about that," he shouted back, and, as he spoke, he dug in his spurs and sent Gray Tom off like a flash, gaining every stride. He knew the big horse could outrun the little mare, and they were in a narrow lane with high fences on either side, which there was no room to leap, and therefore the chances were in his favor.

Sally saw it, too, and checked Flirt, letting Gray Tom come up hand over hand.

In another minute, with a shout of triumph, Stone was beside her, and grasped at the bridle as he came.

With a taunting laugh the girl pulled up so suddenly that he overshot the mark again, wheeled her mare and darted back up the lane toward the road.

Stone ground his teeth as he followed, coming up again and shouting:

"Now, my beauty, I'll get you this time, and you'll pay the forfeit, too. I'll have that kiss or I'll die for it."

Sally turned and shook her whip at him, crying defiantly:

"You'll have to catch me first. Come on, you sick dude. You'll get a nice riding lesson before I've done with you. Houp-la!"

CHAPTER XXII.

GRAY TOM WINS.

AWAY went Flirt, and away went Gray Tom after her to the road.

The little mare, from her perfect training, could double on the big horse every time when she had room, but in the narrow lane she had it not, and Stone was too wary to overshoot his mark a third time.

Besides this, Gray Tom, with the instinct of a well-bred horse, entered into the spirit of the chase, and began to dodge as well as Flirt, in proportion to his size.

Finally they were alongside again, and Stone reached out his hands a third time, crying:

"Now I've got you, my lady."

Smack! crack!

The sting of a riding-whip was in his face, very nearly blinding him, and he instinctively threw up his hand to keep his eyes, when he heard the girl's cry of taunting scorn:

"Not yet, my solid guy. You've got to learn to ride first. Houp-la!"

And before he had recovered his sight she was ahead again, laughing at him.

Setting his teeth angrily, he spurred Gray Tom till the horse fairly flew alongside of Flirt, and crowded the mare close to the fence.

Another moment, and Stone stooped from the saddle and grasped at Sally herself, instead of the bridle.

He had his hand on her waist, and leaned over further to get a full grasp, when Sally suddenly flicked Gray Tom in the face with her whip so sharply that the big horse shied violently, nearly unseating its rider, and Flirt shot out into the road, Sally waving her whip and crying defiantly:

"Not caught yet. I've played that game before, old fellow. Houp-la!"

They were in the high-road again, and off they went, full speed, Gray Tom gaining as before, till Flirt dodged again and threw him out.

Then Sally called out:

"Good-by, dude! I've got business at home. Why don't you catch me? Houp-la!"

And this time she put Flirt on the way to Coalville and scoured along, laughing, the little mare covered with foam, but doing nobly yet, with the grit of her full blood.

But Gray Tom had the best of her now; for he was a long distance horse, and began to come up again faster than before.

And this time Sally altered her tactics, steering from side to side of the road, saving Flirt all she could, and confining herself to dodging and going on again.

Stone felt more confident at every turn, for he saw the mare was tired, and his own horse was fresh.

He had ceased to speak, and his face was lighted up with eagerness as he saw that Sally had more difficulty at every turn in evading his grasp.

The little girl herself kept up her pluck as well as ever, till she had to use her whip again and again on Gray Tom, fighting him off when he came too close.

Then her face flushed angrily, and she called out to Stone:

"Leave me be, you coward! How dare you insult me like this? Take that! and that!"

And she flogged away with her puny strength, for she began to see the man was a ruffian, and meant to take advantage of his superior strength and the size of his horse.

They were on a lonely part of the high-road, for King Philip had acted as a perfect scare for all the people in the neighborhood, and there were woods on either side of the road that hid the country, beyond a curve, a quarter of a mile off.

Stone laughed at her frantic efforts to keep him off, and got closer and closer at every turn, till he finally managed to catch the end of her whip in his hands, as she flogged at him.

Then, with a shout of triumph, he got it away from her, crying:

"Now, my beauty, surrender! I've got you now. Surrender!"

The mare, only used to short, vigorous efforts, was blown with her long race; Sally was pale as death, and eyed Stone with a frightened stare, feeling faint for the first time in her life.

Already Stone's hand was on her shoulder, and he leaned over from the saddle to grasp her, when both riders, who had forgotten all else in their struggle, were startled by the sound of hoofs and wheels close by, and the voice of Lion Charley calling out:

"Heyday! heyday! What's all this?"

The tone was calm and clear, like that of a man in a jocular mood; but it startled Stone from his game, while Sally turned her horse and fled to the side of a small black road-cart, in which sat Noble, driving a stout bay cob, and looking as composed as possible.

The little girl was white and trembling, and began to sob:

"Oh, Charley—I'm so—so glad—you've—you've come. That—that wretch—he's—insulting me—"

But Stone had recovered his coolness as soon as he saw the lion-tamer, who had pulled up his cob and was surveying him as coolly as possible.

He pretended not to notice Noble, but said to Sally:

"I'm sure you've no cause to complain. You've dared me to follow you, and now I've caught you fairly you beg off. It's all your own fault. I wouldn't have followed you at all, if you hadn't invited me. You said you'd give me a riding-lesson, didn't you? Well, you have given me one, and I'm much obliged to you for it. How much do I owe you for it, Miss—ah—Hicks, I believe?"

It was cleverly put to turn the tables on her, and Sally colored furiously, while Charley Noble looked from one to the other in his imperturbably calm manner, as if he did not care to interfere in the matter.

"How much do I owe you?" repeated Stone, with perfect politeness. "Will ten dollars satisfy you? I'm willing to make it twenty, if you'll give me the kiss you owe me fairly."

Charley Noble turned his glowing eyes on the gambler to say slowly:

"What's that, sir?"

Stone tossed his head.

"It was not addressed to you, sir. I was speaking to the lady."

Noble bowed his head gravely.

"You are right. Go on."

Stone smiled triumphantly and went on to Sally:

"You challenged me to a race. I told you I'd kiss you if I caught you, and now you want to beg off and claim protection from this man. I don't call that a fair shake."

Sally had been silent after her first burst of sobs, but she had quickly recovered herself, used as she was to scenes of violent physical exertion and excitement, and her fair face was composed and defiant again as she answered him:

"You came after me without my saying a word to you. I never told you that I'd kiss you if you caught me. You're a mean, contemptible coward, or you wouldn't follow a poor girl to insult her. Go home to your rich ladies and leave me alone, or you'll be sorry for it. And give me back my whip."

Stone laughed tauntingly.

"Oh, no; I'll keep that as a souvenir. You can get it any time you want it, by paying me that kiss you owe me. Good-by, Miss Sally. I'll see this gets into the papers in proper style."

And so saying, he galloped away, leaving Lion Charley sitting in his road-cart in his usual impassive, phlegmatic way, looking at Sally.

The lion-tamer had not offered to look angrily at Stone and Sally saw it and resented it.

She turned on him at once.

"Yes; a pretty friend you are, to sit by like a bump on a log, and see me insulted by that sick masher. I'll remember that on you, Mr. Charley."

Noble raised his hand to smooth his dark mustache—an habitual gesture with him—

and eyed her in the same calm, critical way he had displayed all through the affair but said nothing.

"Why don't you answer?" cried the girl, passionately. "Why don't you get out of the cart and whip him?"

Lion Charley looked her all over from the top of her riding-hat to Flirt's hoofs, and answered in his low, grave tones:

"Because you were wrong, Miss Sally. You shouldn't have provoked him to a race. You might have known that little mare of yours wasn't up to a two mile run with that big horse. How did he come to follow you?"

He looked and spoke with the grave, critical calmness of a judge, and Sally flushed up in confusion, as she began to tell her story, as if she were addressing her own father.

As she told him about King Philip he listened attentively, and when she had finished he observed:

"You hadn't ought to have done that, Miss Sally. You should have let them do their own punishing. Elephant Jim didn't treat your father right, and had no call to ask you to help him. King Philip is going to be a great card, now the folks know he's safe. All he has done in his tantrums will make the guys crazy to see him. It's going to hurt your father's show."

He did not refer at all to the chase or to Stone's brutality, and so frightened Sally by his way of speaking that she forgot all about them, as he intended she should, and began to wring her hands, saying:

"Do you really think so, Char—I mean, Mr. Noble? Will pa be *very* mad?"

"I don't hardly think he will," returned the lion-tamer dryly; "but I tell you what it is, Miss Sally."

"What? what?"

"You'd better come along home with me, before that mare of yours gets cold, or you'll have her unfit to do her act to-night, and your father will lose another of his cards. Come."

So saying, he turned the cob toward Coalville, and they started off on a trot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LUCK CHANGES.

THAT afternoon the Bownse "Show of all Shows" was in full blast, and the people were pouring in to see it, while the tent of Pop Hicks was almost deserted, in spite of its attractions, and all owing to the single circumstance of King Philip having been tamed so thoroughly.

The news spread like wildfire that the great beast had been conquered, and in less than an hour after it was first announced, King Philip himself made his appearance, striding into town, Jim Perkins riding in state upon his neck, Bownse driving in front, in the yellow road-cart, and parading through the principal streets.

The elephant was perfectly free, all his limbs unfettered, and yet as quiet as a lamb; while the many scars and burns on its trunk and forehead had not yet had time to assume the raw appearance exposure would give them when the skin broke.

Bownse had Stone in the wagon with him, and kept saying to his confederate as he looked round him:

"Luck's turned, commodore; luck's turned. We'll get 'em to-day. You'll see."

And "get them" they did; for the people, fickle as people always are, poured in to see the new attraction, leaving the Hicks show so deserted, that Pop Hicks, for the first time in a long career, lost his spirits in the ring, and when Rabbetts coaxed him on to one of his ancient and worm-eaten jokes about the length of a foot being thirteen inches, replied, in pure absence of mind:

"Thirteen hundred dollars at the door, I'll bet a cent."

The trouble was that Coalville, usually a safe two days' stand for Pop, "went back on him" the second day, and crowded to see his rival in the afternoon.

In the evening it was so much worse that Pop closed his ticket-wagon in disgust, took down his tent and moved silently out of town, sending Moone ahead to work up the next station, convinced at last that his rival meant business.

His only consolation for the turn in his luck was that Bownse, in the most unex-

pectedly magnanimous manner, paid for the damage done by King Philip the day before among the vans, and expressed himself in such a friendly and deceitful way about the exchange of attractions, that Pop had been quite taken in, and thought him in earnest.

The next station on the way was the new and flourishing town of Oleopolis, and little Moone busied himself in trying to counteract the return of King Philip to the other show by vivid descriptions of the wonders of Lion Charley's cage, and sneers at Elephant Jim for being unable to bring his elephant into subjection without enlisting the services of Miss "Celestine, Queen of the Arena," whose name was lauded to the skies in Moone's picturesque paragraphs.

But it was soon visible in the papers of the State that another hand, skillful as Moone's and furnished with more money by far, was working against the veteran showman, and working in a way hard to combat.

As the week passed on, and Oleopolis, Marwood, Bradfield, Towton and Blackpool were successively visited by the Hicks and Bownse shows, side by side, slurring paragraphs began to creep in about the Hicks show, and the notice it received grew worse and worse.

Lion Charley's pets were stigmatized as "tame, mangy brutes," with no spirit to them, while King Philip's scars and former ferocity were magnified to the very skies in the same article.

Finally, even the Riding of Sally Hicks was criticised, and the paragrapher took to putting her ring name inside quotation marks, followed by "Sarah or Sal Hicks" in brackets, and the same process was applied to the prosaic "Bridget Stubbs" of Ma'm'selle Hippolyte, while every device was resorted to in order to tear away the veil of romance that hangs around circus celebrities in the eyes of the country people, so far as concerned Pop Hicks's show.

Even little Moone was puzzled and alarmed at the persistence and bitter malignity of the assaults.

He knew that Bownse had not the head to do it, being only a Bowery side-showman, with the body of a giant and the head of a pumpkin, though Bownse fondly imagined he had brains.

He could not believe Stone had done it, for Stone did not look like a newspaper man, and the writer of the notices in question was evidently an old hand at the work.

It was not till he took a flying trip, three days ahead of his show, skipping two towns on the way, that he found out what was the matter, when he came on a large, stout gentleman with white hair writing in a hotel reading-room, and recognized the great Mr. Taylor, head of his profession, usually to be found only in the largest shows and in big towns.

Taylor was scribbling copy in a third-class country hotel, so much absorbed that he did not notice any one around him, and Moone got a chance to retire unseen.

Then the little man knew who was his opponent, and went to his own room to consider what he should do.

He was a scheming little fellow, and he knew that he would have to find out for certain whether Taylor had been engaged by his adversary before he could act intelligently. It seemed as if a little show like Bownse's could not possibly afford to pay the salary that he knew Taylor able to command, many times over his own modest figures.

He went down-stairs again and watched Taylor through the glass doors of the bar-room, till he saw the great advance-agent pick up his copy, dry it on the blotter, and go out.

He kept out of Taylor's way till the latter had gone out into the street, then he went into the reading-room, took up the blotting-pad the agent had used, and discovered, to his great joy that it was a new white one, and that several lines of the writing Taylor had dried were distinctly legible.

To little Moone, used to such scheming and detective work, the clew was sufficient. He put the blotter in his pocket, sallied out into the street, and followed Taylor, before the other could get out of sight.

As he had expected, the agent went the

rounds of the newspaper offices, and Moone managed to keep out of his way till he had completed his business.

Then he started to meet him face to face, and bowed in the most polite manner, in answer to the frigid nod with which Taylor favored him.

There is no place where the rank of people is gauged more thoroughly by the money they earn, than in the show business, and Taylor's hundred-dollar-a-week nod, to little Moone's fifteen-dollar-a-week bow, was the perfection of contrast.

When, therefore, about an hour later, they met in the hotel, and Taylor came up to Moone and offered his hand, with the frank smile of an equal, the humbler man knew that the other had an object to gain.

By that time he had been to his room and held the telltale blotter before the looking-glass, where the reversed letters resumed their order and revealed these words:

"Fowler, whose bareback riding is acknowledged peerless, leaves the Hicks * * * week and will here * * *"

He was puzzling over the meaning of the legend, when Taylor came up and held out his hand saying:

"Ah, Mr. Moone, I believe? Glad to see you. Still with that wagon show I saw you with last winter?"

Moone looked him in the eye with all the innocence he could assume:

"Oh, no! I'm with Pop Hicks now. You're still with the International, I presume?"

"Yes, yes," returned Taylor, carelessly. "Same old racket, Moone. I'm on my way to California now. Don't tell any of the boys you saw me. There's a lady in the case. Good-by."

And he sailed away, leaving Moone in a brown study.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRICKS OF A TRADE.

MOONE did not long stay still after the other agent had departed. He remained sitting in his chair, pretending to smoke till he saw Taylor go to the desk, get his bag and go away, after paying his bill.

Then he strutted up to the clerk and said: "Where did that gentleman say he was going?"

The clerk nodded familiarly. Hotel people are always familiar and patronizing to circus agents, especially when they come from small shows.

"That you, Charley? Oh, yes. That man? He said he was going West by the Cincinnati Express. Do you know him?"

Moone shook his head.

"I'm not sure. What's his name? Seems to me I've seen his face before."

He took a glance at the register and saw the place where the clerk had just noted the departure.

The name on the book was "Wm. J. Norman," when he knew the man well as "Norman J. Taylor."

"That's all. Thank you," he said, and he hurried out and followed Taylor in a hack to the depot, where he saw him enter a local train bound south to the very next town on his route.

The little agent kept out of the way, and slipped into a rear car unseen by Taylor.

All through the journey he wrote steadily in his note-book, making out notices and advertisements on a lavish scale, and as soon as the train reached the town of Stoneburg, next on the route, he jumped into a hack before Taylor could see him and drove straight to the offices of three papers in town.

Armed as he was, with his notices all drawn, and well known to the proprietors and editors, he had no difficulty in getting in all he wanted, while his rival was still in the hotel getting ready, fondly thinking he had stolen a march on Moone, having deceived him as to his real employment and destination.

Moone took care not to get out of the hack, except to enter the newspaper offices and pay his regular visit to the bill-posters and hotels to secure accommodation for his show when it came in.

He waited also for the hotels till he saw his rival on the street proceeding to the newspapers with perfect unsuspectance that he was watched, and Moone left the town of Stoneburg two hours after he entered it, leaving

behind him a blast for his foes that he trusted would make them wince.

Back to the town from whence he had come he flew, and arrived just as the papers for the evening were coming out.

Buying a copy of each, he scanned it thoroughly till he came on the words that the blotter had revealed, in their full context, in the midst of an article called:

"THE SHOW OF ALL SHOWS."

The article was in the same style as those which had done so much harm already to Pop Hicks, and concluded by informing the public that all the paying cards of Pop's show were going to leave him shortly, for that:

"Mr. Thomas Fowler, whose bareback-riding is acknowledged peerless, leaves the Hicks concern next week, and will hereafter appear in the Show of all Shows. Poor Pop will have to walk home before the season's over."

Little Moone nodded and smiled to himself, then sat down and wrote at a rate that would have surprised anybody but a reporter or advance-agent. He kept up his scribbling in his quiet room in the hotel till very nearly daylight, when he snatched a few hours' sleep, utterly exhausted, and set out on his next day's work.

He had to "do" two towns that he had skipped, and the one he was in, in a single day, and then come up with Taylor, get ahead of him, if possible, and fight him to hurt, before Taylor knew where he was.

And to do this, he must have everything written out before he got into the towns, so as to lose no time in the different offices.

How he wrote, and how his active brain worked that silent, lonely night!

Comic and sentimental stories; romantic anecdotes; items of news about public people not in the show business at all, but prominent in the district in which he was traveling, succeeded each other with marvelous rapidity.

Not one was true; but they all had an air of reality that would have imposed on any one but a showman or a reporter.

All emanated from his fertile brain, and all were sure to be read by the people, and to call up some interest in some person or feature of the Hicks show.

Moone felt he was in a desperate fight, and that, to win, he must hit hard.

And to hit hard he must keep out of Pop Hicks's way; for the old man had not the nerve of the little agent, and would have objected to a good deal of what he was now putting on paper.

Moone saw that it was necessary to defend Sally Hicks, now that she was covertly attacked, and he knew the whole history of the capture of King Philip by heart, as also of Sally's escapade and pursuit by Stone.

He brought in that gentleman's name and that of Leonard in a scathing exposure of their tricks and object, and, when it was all written, set out on his journey to "do" the towns he had skipped.

To his intense mortification, he found that no one would touch the affair. All had evidently been heavily bribed ahead by Taylor, and every editor refused to put in a line against the magnate of Coalville, though they accepted all the Hicks advertisements, and the stories that did not bear against the other show.

Then little Moone's determination not to be beaten came out stronger than ever.

He sat down and wrote a letter to Pop Hicks, telling him what he had found out and that he was going ahead, and advised him, if the business did not improve under the new notices, to skip the towns he mentioned, and move straight on to Stoneburg.

He cut out the slip about Tom Fowler, and inclosed it, with the addresses for the next three days, at the places where he would be as he intended.

Then, not wasting a moment, he went to the railroad station, and began to write more notices while he was waiting for the train to follow and overtake Taylor.

He arrived in Marbleville in the middle of the night, went to the principal hotel and found the identical "Wm. J. Norman" on the blotter.

He had run his rival to earth, and Taylor, as he found, had not "done" the town yet, feeling probably secure on account of the absence of his rival.

Moone concluded to skip the town in the

morning, unless his rival staid in bed very late, and he was wise in his determination.

Mr. Taylor went at his day's work on time, and Moone was compelled to leave that town to the clutches of the enemy, while he hurried on to the next, and kept ahead of Taylor for the next three days.

At the end of that time the fruit of his work began to appear, as first one paper and then another came out with his articles on the persecution to which Sally Hicks was being exposed by "two rich libertines, whose names were only suppressed out of consideration for their families, but would be published if the persecution continued."

Sarcastic queries appeared as to:

"Who is William J. Norman?"

"Why has Taylor changed his name?"

"Who pays Norman J. Taylor?"

Then Stone had his turn in another part of the paper about the way in which Gray Tom had thrown him at the fence, and was asked:

"Who set his nose when Lion Charley broke it at Popokus?"

His experiment at elephant training was commented on, and he was fully described as "the gentleman who drives in another man's four-in-hand, and makes his living by persistent suction of flats, a certain rich mine owner of Coalville being his present victim."

Of all these paragraphs Taylor, in the advance, was blissfully ignorant till he received a telegram from Mr. Bownse that seemed fairly to bristle with indignation:

"Come here immediately. What in blazes do we pay you for? G. B. B."

The message was dated at Quarry Center, one of the back towns, and as soon as he got there and saw Bownse, the irate manager burst out in a shriek:

"You're a blank of an agent, you are! Do you know what's happened to-day?"

Taylor bristled up instantly.

"What do you mean, sir?"

Bownse shook his fist, frantic with rage, yelling:

"We've been hissed in the streets, sir, and it's all your fault, curse you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

MANAGER AND AGENT.

If a show comes to trouble, the advance-agent catches it. If business runs down, the blame is put on his shoulders, and never on the poverty of the exhibition—by the owners, at least.

Had Taylor heard any ordinary accusation he would have laughed at it, but when the manager said what he did, the agent could only gasp:

"Hissed in the streets! When?"

"This very day!" howled Bownse, excitedly, and he reached to a table and picked up a number of newspapers, which he shook in the air, frantic with excitement. "Look at those, sir! Look at 'em—look at 'em! And you call yourself an agent, to let those sort of things come out about us! On our own ground, by gosh, sir—on our own ground! And we a-paying you seventy-five dollars a week, by the jumping Jerushy Crambo Crap!!! Ain't you ashamed to look me in the face, sir, by gosh? Ain't you? By gosh, I'm that mad I could tear you to pieces, by gosh! How dare you look at me like that?"

And the excitable Bownse, who had a soft spot in his head, actually danced up and down, and foamed at the mouth in his fury.

Taylor, the agent, was a large, fine-looking man, with a peculiarly distinguished appearance, and he stood surveying the excited manager with a surprise and scorn that found words at last in the exclamation:

"Are you crazy, Mr. Bownse?"

"Yes, by gosh!" howled Bownse, dancing up and down again—"crazy, by gosh! stark, staring mad, by gosh! and enough to make me, too, by gosh! To see you stand there, by gosh! and look me in the face, and know what you've done to me, by gosh! It's enough to make any man crazy. Look at that, sir, look at THAT!"

And he shook the papers under old Taylor's nose, spluttering in fury, till he turned pale and sunk on a chair, exhausted with the violence of his own rage.

Taylor waited till he had reached that stage, when the portly agent demanded:

"Well, Mr. Bownse, if you're calm enough to understand anything, perhaps you'll tell me why you sent for me, and what you mean by all this abuse. I've managed shows for twenty years, sir; circuses to which your paltry little concern would not be worthy to act as a side-show; and I say, sir, that in all that time, sir, I was never insulted so, sir! I didn't ask to join your show, sir. You had to send and beg for me to come, and I wouldn't do it till I had a responsible guarantee for my salary. I've worked your dirty little concern as it was never worked before, and driven your rival—a better man than you, sir—off his own twenty-years' route—and you presume to swear at me, sir! Confound your impudence! manage your own show. You don't know how to treat a gentleman."

And in proportion as the portly agent, with his white hair and beard, grew excited and swelled and fumed, G. B. Bownse began to pull in his horns and think he had gone too far in his excitement.

Onion George was essentially a bully and a coward, with an unlimited reverence and longing for just one thing—money.

He had been a poor man, and had had to cringe, in his time, to vulgar brutes possessed of more money than himself; for showmen in very many cases are vulgar and brutal to the core of their hearts.

Now that he had money and a show of his own, he treated others as he had been treated himself, and let loose his temper as it suited him on his inferiors.

But, with all his bullying of those beneath him, he still cringed as humbly as ever to those above him in the show scale, and he well knew the terrible power that lies in an advance-agent, if he belong, like Taylor, to a large show, and have a spite against the owner of a small one, running anywhere near his own concern.

And Taylor was a man of letters who had been a successful dramatist and squandered two fortunes, being well known all over the States, in places where Bownse had never been heard of or mentioned.

Only his extreme rage had blinded the big manager to this, and as soon as Taylor had finished, he began to whine:

"By gosh, Taylor, you're so peppery, by gosh, you can't understand a man, by gosh! I'm high crazy, by gosh! I'm ruined, ruined! Look at those papers and see if I haven't reason to blame you. I leave it to yourself, by gosh!"

His tone instantly softened the other, who was a gentleman by instinct, and he said, more placably:

"You can do *that* with perfect safety, sir. If I'm wrong I always acknowledge it. My reputation is worth more to me than any amount of money. What are these papers you speak of?"

"Here," groaned the manager, giving him the bundle. "Look at 'em, by gosh! Ruined, by gosh—ruined, ruined!"

Taylor pretended not to notice him, though Onion George was now fairly blubbering at his own woes, and the old agent quietly scanned the papers the other had thrown him.

He did this in a methodical way, first putting them all in order of dates and places, then looking them over with the rapid, searching glance of an old clippings editor.

Occasionally he compressed his lips or allowed a faint smile to ruffle his white beard, but he made no remark till he had scanned the last paragraph, when he laid down the papers and said, quietly:

"By Jove, Bownse, that's well done. I'll never undervalue a little man who has shabby clothes again. That's Moone."

Bownse growled miserably.

"What do I care who it is? I'm ruined, by gosh! Hissed in the streets! Stones thrown at my partner and his friends in the four-in-hand. Sure card everywhere else, and here they just pelted 'em with mud and eggs. Not a soul in the afternoon show, by gosh, except the gosh-darned reporters, come to write up the affair, asking more questions, by gosh, than if they was detectives, and then waltzin' over to the other show, by gosh, and writin' 'em up like they was a reg'lar boss band of angels in upper-crust society in heaven, and we was the lowest of the low. What's to be done, Taylor? What's to be

done? Gosh-darn it, you've got me into the scrape—get me out."

And Onion George blubbered like a calf.

Old Taylor let him sob a little, and then said, in his grave, quiet way:

"There, there, man. I thought you were used to the show business. This is only a smart trick of little Moone's. Oh, he's a good man, sir, a good man. He's beaten me fairly, and I own it. But I'm not dead yet, Mr. Bownse, and this fight's not by any means over, as you'll find. Where's your partner?—the moneyed man, I mean. This thing wants to be handled well, but we need money. This Mr. Stone, I must see him."

Onion George pointed to the adjoining room, and said gloomily:

"They're in there, by gosh! Wish I'd never seen them, by gosh! It'll stick to me fur twenty year. Hissed in the streets, by gosh! Elephant and all! They're in there. Go in—go in."

He waved his hand, and Taylor opened the door, to find a hotel parlor, in which sat two gentlemen, trying to smoke and talk together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PLAIN TALK FROM MR. TAYLOR.

THE old agent was slightly acquainted with both of them, but only in a business way. When Bownse had written to him, at the beginning of the season, offering him an engagement, Taylor had been out of a job, owing to a quarrel with his managers in the large show, he being a peppery and pompous personage.

He had written back to give his terms, but insisted on a guarantee for his salary, which Bownse had been unable to give till he met Stone and Leonard, and the young mine-owner had become his guarantee in writing.

Since his engagement the show had prospered, making the present blow all the more unexpected and stunning.

Quarry Center was one of the towns where Taylor had put in his best work, and where Moone's articles had been refused, but the Quarry Center people read the Stoneburg papers, and by the time that the shows arrived extracts had been hawked about the streets, and had excited the people as only insults to women can excite men of the Anglo-Saxon race.

They had started the cry as soon as they saw Leonard's four-in-hand in the streets heading the show:

"Down with the mashers!"

"Insult ladies, will ye?"

"Give it to the mashers, boys!"

Then came a shower of eggs, and mud, and stones, till Stone and his friends had been fairly driven to the hotel, and the police had to be called in to help the circus men.

Pop Hicks's show, on the contrary, had been surrounded with friends for the first time in a week, and was doing a rushing business, just at the time when Pop was thinking he should have to send home for money to meet the dreaded Saturday night that brings so many shows to grief.

Such was the state of affairs when Mr. Taylor walked into the hotel parlor and found Stone and Leonard quarreling over what had happened.

They eyed him with no friendly glances as he came in, and Stone observed, in his savagely sarcastic way:

"Good-day, sir. Have you come to take a look at the results of paying you seventy-five dollars a week to manipulate public opinion for us? I don't think you've any reason to be proud of your abilities, when you let a little Bowery side-showman walk away with you like that."

This was more like the talk Taylor was accustomed to, and it nettled him to say, as bitterly as Stone:

"I don't see that he's got away with me so much. If you'd told me you had such a weak record, I could have looked out for it. I thought it was all to be legitimate show business; but it seems you've let a woman run away with your wits. I'm not going to be held responsible for that."

"He's right, Stone; he's right," burst out Leonard. "By Jove, he's right, you know. It's a beastly shame, you know. And I don't see, by Jove, that we're any nearer the end than we were when we started, you know."

Stone curled his lip.

"You never do see. Didn't we have the man nearly ruined? Didn't his best rider offer to come to us?"

"No no, by Jove, no. Give the devil his due, you know, Stone. No, he didn't. We sent for him, you know, through Jim Perkins, and he said he'd come if Pop Hicks didn't come to time on Saturday. But he didn't offer to come to us, you know."

"Well, it's all the same, anyhow," said Stone, indifferently. "He'd come if he lost a week's pay, and that's enough. Pop hasn't got the money to pay his hands, and one day's good business isn't going to give it to him. Here we've had eight days' good houses to his one, and he didn't get out of a single town without a dead loss. This is a check; that's all."

"Certainly, certainly," broke in Taylor. "Only a check. Such things must be, in the nature of the show business. Up to-day, down to-morrow. Very sensible view to take, Mr. Stone."

Stone sneered at him.

"Yes, for you. It's all your fault."

Taylor colored high.

"It's *not* my fault, sir, and you know it. It's yours for deceiving me."

"Deceiving you? Well, I swear—"

"You needn't, sir. I say deceived me. Had you told me your object was to get this girl into your power by ruining her father I should have known what to expect and how to work the papers. My only instructions were to break down the Hicks show by any means in my power. I think I may say I did so pretty effectually, till that little fellow sprung a trap on me, for which I give him due credit. Now I suppose you want to know what to do to remedy the evil?"

"Of course we do; but you can't tell us, I'll bet," snapped Stone.

Old Taylor laughed.

"My dear sir, you don't know quite as much as you think you do. It's as simple as A B C. Which of you is it that's crazy after this girl?"

Stone bit his lips and looked at his friend, who drawled out:

"Why, I am, if you want to know. She's pretty, and she rides so devilish well, by Jove, that I'm enchanted with her."

"And you want to get her out of that show, while you're a millionaire, and don't know how to do it," said the old agent, with a chuckle, for he was a fat and very sensual man in his way, with few scruples to prevent him from joining in such a scheme. "Why, my dear sir, it's by no means necessary to ruin her father to do that."

Leonard jumped up—positively jumped in his eagerness, exclaiming:

"By Jove! You don't say so. Confound it, Stone, you told me it was."

Stone sneered bitterly.

"I've told you a good many things, but you won't follow my advice. Of course you can buy the girl, if you want to plank down fifty thousand dollars in trustees' hands to secure her against loss if you marry. But that's not what you wanted, as I understood it. You wanted to do it *cheap*. The cheapest way to get the girl was to ruin her father."

Old Taylor looked at the gambler in a singular way, half-admiring, half-disgusted, as he observed, dryly:

"You may be right, sir, if you succeed in ruining the poor man, but how about your conscience afterward?"

Stone burst into a scornful laugh, and Leonard followed him, asking:

"By Jove, I say, Colden, is the gentleman a parson, you know?"

Taylor flushed deeply. The sarcasm on his single impulse of honor and gentlemanly spirit cut him deeply, and he retorted, with great dignity:

"No, sir, only a *gentleman*. Possibly you don't understand my meaning."

Leonard looked at him stupidly.

"No, 'pon my soul I don't."

"I mean," returned Taylor, "that if you want to prevail on the scruples of a circus-rider to live with you, and can't do it without ruining her father, you must not expect me to help you, sir. I'm no Joseph, I admit, and the show business has taken out of me a good many scruples I once entertained; but, by Jove, sir, count me out of any such plan."

If you merely want to get the girl, I'll help you cheerfully—"

"Will you?" interrupted Leonard, in a trance of delight. "How? How?"

"How? Simply by going over in a business way to see her, and telling her she's a fool to throw away a chance of establishing herself in life, that's all," replied the old sensualist, coolly. "The girl would be a fool to reject it. But you'll have to come down, you know. She's worth a hundred dollars a week in any show in America."

Leonard's eyes rolled up in horror.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated. "A hundred dollars a week? Why, that's five thousand dollars a year, man."

Taylor grinned.

"What of that? It's not *quite* that, for the season's only forty weeks. But if you'll settle that on her, for a certainty, I've no doubt all her friends will advise her to take it, when she can get it without risking her neck twice a day to do so."

Leonard shook his head resolutely.

"No, by Jove, that's too stiff. I wouldn't mind going fifty a week, you know, for a year or two; but, hang it, four thousand a year, just to get a girl who rides well to go out with a fellow! Oh, no, no! Stone's right, by Jove. It's cheaper to follow his way, you know."

Taylor shrugged his shoulders. He was a sensualist who had not hesitated to give the most immoral advice, but like most men who are sensual by bodily temperament, he imagined himself virtuous when he came on one of his few scruples, and he had a great contempt for anything like parsimony, being a spendthrift by habit and inclination.

"Very well, gentlemen," he said, rising, "you can consider my services at an end, and I'll make you a present of this week's salary. You got yourselves into this scrape by not being frank with me in the first instance. Now get out as you please. Good-day."

And he rose to go.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GREAT TEMPTATION.

THE threat of abandonment brought Leonard to terms at once, and he jumped up to detain Taylor, urging for a little time to consider.

The wily old agent had made the threat on purpose to secure a compromise, and he succeeded at last.

Stone and Leonard agreed to leave the show and keep out of sight on account of the scandal their presence created, and Taylor guaranteed to hush matters up and drive Pop Hicks to the wall for them.

His condition was that his salary should be doubled, and his allowance for expenses be made large enough to cover all the bribery he foresaw he would have to resort to.

Leonard, who was, as Taylor had found, mean in the midst of all his lavish and wasteful expenditure, "kicked" for a long time against the agreement, but finally consented, and wrote the letter that Taylor demanded before he would stir in the matter.

Then the veteran set to work with all the skill of which he had become master in twenty years' show experience, to get Bownse cut of the slough of despond in which he had been cast so utterly unexpectedly, and to rehabilitate the "Show of all Shows" in the public eye.

The four-in-hand publicly left Quarry Center that very afternoon; and the evening papers contained a card from "G. B. Bownse, Manager," couched in a strain of virtue that was positively ascetic, in which the noble-hearted G. B. B. stated that:

"Having discovered when too late the character of his wicked associates, he had dissolved partnership with them forthwith, at a cost of thousands of dollars, preferring an honest crust to the most luxurious fare that gilded iniquity could provide; and lamenting the fact that his easy and trustful nature, inherited from a long line of religious ancestors in the town of Eastport, Maine, had rendered him so liable to imposition from men whose respectability was vouched for by the Governor of the State himself."

Taylor and Bownse chuckled over the card as it went into the papers, for the Bowery manager had recovered his spirits as soon as Stone left, and reflected that so far in the campaign, he had actually made some money, and had been advertised on other

men's cash to an extent he never could have accomplished by himself.

And the money was still to come in, as he reflected, while all the advantage that would accrue from the fight was to belong to G. B. B., and the losses were certain to fall to Stone and Leonard, as men not in the business, and therefore to be fleeced at all hazards.

The publication of the card had a decidedly good effect. It came out in the evening papers, and Bownse had about half a house, not unfavorably disposed.

Taylor put in his work well, and, for a man of his weight and inactive habits, performed wonders for the next week, during which the "Show of all Shows" managed nearly to clear itself though not making any money.

But Bownse saw plainly that his rival was in hardly any better plight after the first burst of sympathy was over, and Pop Hicks had no such backers as he had, in the men with whom a feeling of revenge for slights and eagerness to win were about equally mingled.

So the shows went on their way through the Pennsylvania towns, to the borders of Maryland, when little Moone met his redoubtable antagonist, Taylor, for the first time on their trip since the young man had fooled the old one.

He expected to meet with anger and even with violence, for his puny little frame, worn out with work and anxiety, made him unusually nervous that day; but, to his surprise, the other greeted him with a cordiality that overwhelmed and awed the shabby little man, who saw in Taylor only the greatest of advance men, whose word could make or unmake him in many different ways.

The older man shook hands with him, congratulated him on the "splendid way, by Jove, sir, in which you handled that affair. It did you honor and shows you have *ideas*, sir, ideas, a thing very few men have, sir. I bear you no malice, for I lied to you, and deserved all I got."

"And why *did* you lie to me?" asked Moone.

Taylor hesitated.

"To tell the truth, my dear boy, I was really and truly ashamed to sign my name as the agent of a little concern like that, and I was not known in those small towns; so I just concealed my name and took my mother's. But I tell you what it is, you ought not, with your talents, to be slaving for old Pop Hicks. He's a good enough, old fellow; but close, sir, close as they make 'em. Why don't you come over to our side? I can get you in at treble your present salary, at once."

Moone trembled all over. He had a little family at home who took all his slender salary, while he lived on the expenses he was allowed on the road, not by any means great in the Hicks show. The temptation came to him at a moment when he was particularly weak, for he had begun to see that his efforts were all in vain to lift the show that was followed with such persistent malignity as to render a monetary success impossible.

"Saturday nights" were telling on Pop Hicks, in temper as well as pocket, and the old man had more than once bitterly reproached him for bringing his daughter's name into the papers against orders, and, as it had turned out, to only temporary effect.

Tom Fowler, the bare-back rider, had been growling for some time about his salary being behind, sometimes as much as half a week, and the whole show was pervaded by an atmosphere of discontent, that comes over the most united bodies in times of financial depression.

And here came to Moone in the guise of a big, jolly, Falstaffian individual, the tempter of ease and comfort, offering him a sum that, to the overworked and underpaid agent, seemed to be a colossal fortune.

Taylor saw the struggle in his thin face and continued kindly:

"What's the use of your killing yourself to pay for a dead horse? You may work all you like, and we're bound to win in the end. I'll not deny that you may carry Hicks on your back a few weeks longer, nay, even to the end of the season; but he'll go into winter quarters without a penny, if he *does* pull through, which I doubt; and you'll have the name of having been connected with a losing show."

Moone shivered slightly, but controlled his

face to its habitual weary calm, to answer, slowly:

"Mr. Taylor, I don't know what right you have to talk to me in this way. You wouldn't break *your* contract with a man, would you? In our business a man's word *must* be held, sacred, or he may as well move out at once."

Taylor shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. Very proper, of course. Yes; I'll admit that honor is *supposed* to govern our transactions in the main, but no man is bound to refuse an offer which will better him in the world."

Moone had recovered his self-control, which had been sorely shaken by the insidious offer of the tempter, and he replied, with perfect coolness:

"I'm not aware that I've had any offer yet, Mr. Taylor."

Taylor colored slightly with pleasure, and asked abruptly:

"Would you entertain one, if it was made to you at once?"

"Certainly, I would," replied Moone, calmly.

"You would?"

"Of course I would *entertain* it. I don't say I would *accept* it. That's a very different thing."

"How?" asked Taylor, suspiciously.

"I mean, it would depend on the nature of the offer."

The old agent looked relieved.

"I see, I see. Very proper to be prudent. But you'd entertain it and, even if you refused it, the matter would remain in confidence between us?"

"I don't say that, either," returned Moone, quietly. "I wouldn't deal with you alone."

Taylor flushed angrily.

"Why not, why not?"

Moone smiled serenely.

"Because you're not the party that would be responsible for the offer. That's plain, I hope. You're making me an offer to buy my services. If I sell, I must be certain of my money, and you know you are not peculiarly responsible."

The old agent laughed. He did not seem to be in the least offended by the little man's frankness.

"You're quite right, Moone. I spend all I get, and more, too. But suppose I bring you a definite offer from good and responsible parties, how then?"

Moone pursed up his lips.

"It must be in writing, from a party of known responsibility, before I can look at it. I don't trust Bownse. You don't yourself, or I'm mistaken in you."

Taylor evaded the point.

"You're a smart little guy, Moone, but that's none of your business. All you want to know is that *your* money is safe. Isn't that so?"

"Not entirely."

"Why not?"

"I must know who's going to pay it."

"I shall."

"Then I've nothing to say but good-evening, Mr. Taylor."

And the little man rose to go off, when Taylor caught his sleeve and pulled him down, half-forcibly, half-jocularly, saying as he did so:

"Confound it all, Moone, I like you! There's the right stuff in you, and I'm going to hire you for my assistant. I'm getting too old and stout to work as I used. I'll tell you what I'll do with you."

He paused awhile, as if to collect his thoughts, and went on slowly:

"I'll bring you a written offer from a responsible party, with a certified check for a quarter's salary, at forty-five dollars a week, if you'll promise to say yes or no when you receive it. There! is that fair enough?"

Moone nodded.

"Perfectly fair, but I shall require a day to think over it."

"You can't have it. I'll give you three hours. Is that a bargain?"

Moone bowed his head.

"It is. When will you bring the offer to me, and where?"

"To-morrow, at Charlestown. Noon."

"It's a bargain," said Moone, gravely.

"Good-night, Mr. Taylor."

He went away and telegraphed at once to Pop Hicks:

"Come up to see me at Charlestown. The enemy are weakening. If you can't come, send some one who can."

The message dispatched, he smiled to himself, and muttered:

"You old sinner, I'll beat you yet!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

POP'S TRIBULATION.

CHARLESTOWN was full of the bills of the two shows when Pop Hicks drove in on his red road-cart, with the big piebald, and went to the hotel to see little Moone.

The old man looked much thinner than when he had started out in the season, for there's nothing like losing business to put wrinkles into a man's face, more from anticipation of the future than what is actually going out, all the time.

Pop put up his piebald in the shed, and hunted about for Moone, to no effect.

Finally he asked for him at the desk, and found that the little agent had written him a note, to be given him when he arrived.

He hastily opened it, and found the words:

"Taylor wants me to join their show, at forty-five dollars a week, to be guaranteed by a certified check for a quarter's salary. He is to make me a written offer to-day, at the Tompkins House, where I've taken a room. Come round, if you get here before eleven o'clock; but take care Taylor does not see you, or all the fat will be in the fire."

"C. H. MOONE."

Pop turned pale as he read. It was the heaviest blow he had yet received.

Moone had been his right arm in the whole business, and had seemed to be so entirely faithful to Pop's interest that the thought of losing him cut the old showman like a knife.

Moone did not say whether he was going to accept the offer, or whether he meant it as a bid for higher pay; but Pop Hicks, accustomed to the push and competition of show business, never doubted for a single instant that the letter was a "strike."

He folded it up gloomily, and took his way to the Tompkins House, found the number of Moone's room, and walked up without any ceremony, to find the door locked.

He rapped on it, and was admitted by the little agent, who began to laugh at his lugubrious face, saying:

"What's the matter, Mr. Hicks? Don't you feel well?"

Pop Hicks looked at him with still more funereal gloom as he replied:

"You'd orter ask that. So you're goin' back on me too, are you? Well, boy, it's all right. When a feller gets in a hole there's allers lots to kick at him."

Moone laughed as carelessly as before.

"What's the use of whining, Pop? Take your gruel like a man. It's all in a season's work, isn't it?"

Pop sunk into a chair and ground his teeth in bitterness.

"Yes, that's all well enough for you, but it ain't all in a season's work for a man to have all his attractions stolen from him by underhand work. But it's all right, Charley Moone. I ain't complainin'. You've got a right to change, if you kin better yourself, I s'pose. I can't pay ye no forty-five dollars a week, and ye know it. If I promised it, I'd only come to smash a little quicker, that's all. Taylor's too many guns for ye, and ye'll have to go, I s'pose."

Moone listened calmly.

"I don't know that, Pop."

"Don't know what?" asked Pop, in the same gloomy way as before.

"That I'll have to go," responded Moone, quietly.

Pop shook his head.

"I tell ye, I can't pay no forty-five dollars a week, nohow. Show wouldn't stand it, if we was a-boomin', an' now I'll have all I kin do to scratch through. No, Charley, if you can't get on as you are, you've got to go."

Moone laughed shortly.

"Hem! I suppose you want to discharge me before my contract is up. Is that it?"

Pop looked at him in his simple, honest way, as he answered:

"Now, Charley Moone, you an' me allers been more like friends than manager and agent. 'Tain't fur you to go a-gaggin' at me like I was one of the guys. Twenty years have I managed a show, an' no man never knowed me to break a contract, unless the feller kicked up, like Elephant Jim. No, sir; if you'd ka' stuck by me, I'd ha' held my

contract with you and all the rest of the boys, though I had to sell out every beast and wagon I had, to get into town for the winter. I ain't tryin' to break no contracts, so don't ye say it, boy. You know better."

"Then neither am I," returned Moone, who had been watching him closely all the time he spoke. I'm not aware that I've asked you for any increase of wages, Mr. Hicks. I've simply told you of the offer made me by another party, and asked you to come here and witness the way in which I meet it, that's all."

Pop stared at him and began to tremble.

"What?" he asked. "And ye ain't goin' back on me, like the rest?"

Moone shook his head, answering:

"It was a temptation to a man on fifteen dollars a week to be offered forty-five, and I'll admit it staggered me for a while, Pop; but I've thought better of it, or I wouldn't have sent you word."

"But you telegraphed me that the enemy was weakenin'," pursued Pop, seeming bewildered. "Where—how?"

Moone laughed.

"Don't you see it? They've found me a thorn in their sides, and want to get me over. It's costing them like blazes to pay Taylor, and he's not used to their work. He's fat and lazy. Accustomed to have assistants and a big show, with stacks of paper. I tell you he's weakened, *himself*, and if he comes here to-day with the check, it will show *they* have weakened, too. We may be nearer to success than you think. Hark! What's that? It's steps in the passage. Here, hide quick. I had that wardrobe on purpose."

He shoved the puzzled manager into a large wardrobe at the side of the room, turned the key on him, and whispered:

"Keep still and listen."

A rap at the door startled him, and he unlocked it to admit Mr. Taylor, who walked in, puffing, and seated himself on the bed, remarking:

"Oh, my heavens, those stairs! They take—the breath out of—a fellow—more—especially when he's as heavy—as I am. Phew! Daren't trust your chairs. When I'm down on the floor I can't get up so easy. I'll sit here."

Little Moone shut the door and shot the bolt again, when Taylor observed, smiling:

"Very proper, Moone. Don't want every one to hear what's going on, hey? Well, have you thought over what I said?"

Moone walked to the window and looked out before he answered, shortly:

"Yes, I have."

Taylor began to rummage in his pockets, puffing all the while.

"Ah, yes, yes. Here, man, take a cigar. None of your country five-centers, but imported, and fit for an emperor. Confound it, Moone, I was as poor as you are once, and made my living by taking my chances as they came to me. May as well smoke a fifty-cent Havana when it don't cost you anything, hey?"

Moone took the offered cigar indifferently, lighted and began to smoke it, while Taylor, engaged in a similar operation, watched him furtively.

The big man was puzzled at the quiet impassivity of the little one, attributing it to a desire to drive a good bargain, and the little one was measuring his foe before they entered on the contest of wits.

Taylor believed in the ameliorating and seductive effects of good-cheer in driving a bargain, and presently began:

"Well, Moone, well, what d'ye think?"

"About what?" asked Moone, assuming a vacant stare, at which Taylor smiled in approval of his cunning, and the contest began.

"About what? Why, about what I spoke to you of yesterday."

"What was that?"

"Joining our show, of course."

"Did we speak of that?"

"Yes, we did, and I'm here to meet you as I promised, by appointment with you."

"So I see. Well?"

"It's for me to say—Well? What's your answer?"

"To what?"

"To my proposition."

"You've made none officially."

"Well, I'll make it again, then."

"As you please."

"Will you come to our show at once for forty-five dollars a week?"

"Who makes the offer?"

"I do."

"No. I told you that before."

"Will you come on Bownses's written offer, then?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"A guarantee."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

TAYLOR puffed at his cigar a moment.

"What guarantee will content you?"

"A secure one. What have *you* to offer?"

The old agent put his hand in his breast-pocket, brought out a paper, and said in a nervous sort of way:

"Now, Moone, it's understood this goes no further. If you refuse my offer (and I don't think you're fool enough to do it), but, if you refuse my offer—you must not tell any mortal man or woman what I'm going to tell you."

Moone smiled dubiously.

"I promise to *tell* no one, Mr. Taylor; but if the matter leaks out through your own want of caution, you must not complain of the consequences. Some one may have followed you to my room and be listening at the door now."

Taylor started up with more agility than he had shown for months, strode to the door and looked up and down the passage.

"Phew! how you scared me," he said, as he sat down again. "I thought some one was listening at the transom. No, no, don't you be afraid, my boy. When Norm Taylor forgets to hide his tracks, it will be because he's too drunk to see straight, and I won't blame you for that, you know."

"All right," was the placid reply. "Go on and talk business. I've got to make another town to-day."

Taylor laughed.

"Let the town go."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Something you might not understand," said Moone very dryly.

"Tell it to me and I'll see," said Taylor.

"Only the fact that I'm under contract with Mr. Hicks, who pays me to do a certain amount of work," answered Moone, still more dryly.

Taylor uttered an impatient oath.

"You're beating about the bush too long. As if I didn't understand your airs! You want a big price, Moone, and I don't blame you. I frankly admit you're worth it. I'll talk business straight. Here's a check drawn to your order, and certified at the bank of this very town for a quarter's salary in advance, at forty-five dollars a week. Look at it. Thirteen weeks at forty-five is five hundred and eighty-five, and you can have all the money you want for expenses."

Moone took the check and scanned it carefully, asking:

"Who's this George Leonard, who signs it?"

"Why, don't you know? It's the same man you raised such a rumpus about; but he's worth a good five millions yet, and anyhow, as you see, the check's certified."

"Is he the party I'm to get my orders from, if I accept your offer?"

"No, no, you'll get them from me. He's only the financial backer of the concern."

"Ah, then he's in still, and Onion George's letter was all a sham?"

Taylor laughed slightly.

"You knew that long ago, didn't you?"

"I might have divined it; but I couldn't very well have proved it. Now I *can*."

"I guess not. Neither can you now, if the court knows herself."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Taylor."

The little man's tone was icy cold, and Taylor exclaimed hastily:

"Bless my soul! what do you mean? You wouldn't betray confidence?"

"Oh, no, but I could prove it for all that."

"How? I defy you to do it. You wouldn't get me to say what I've done before witnesses, and my word's as good as yours. Aha, Mr. Moone, you're not as smart as you think you are. But come, come, this is all a

game of bluff. Business is business. What do you say?"

"To this offer?"

"Of course."

"Well, Mr. Taylor," said Moone, in the coolest way in the world, "I regret to say that I cannot engage with you this season, being under contract with Mr. Hicks till we go into town for the winter."

Taylor flushed purple with anger, and rose up from the bed to say:

"As you please, you little whelp; but I tell you one thing—"

He stopped short as little Moone threw open the door of the wardrobe, and showed Pop Hicks, chuckling and radiant, stepping out into the room.

Taylor was struck dumb, and Pop said to him, with a sarcasm that cut the agent's pride to the quick:

"Norm Taylor, I didn't think you was sich a greeny as that. Well, you laid yourself out that time, like a live corpse, didn't ye? Give my regards to George Bownse, and tell him Pop ain't run out yet, as he'll find out. And as for you—"

He turned on little Moone, and fairly lifted him off his feet to hug him.

"Me and you don't part, Mooney, not if it takes every acre I've got in the old homestead to keep you. I'll raise yer salary, darned if I don't do it, if I bu'st fur it, for it's the fu'st square chance I've had at old Norm Taylor in many a year."

The gorgeous agent had been speechless at first with surprise and mortification. Now he recovered himself to say, with an emphasis about which there was no sort of mistake:

"Moone, you played it well. I can't say a word, sir, not a word. I ought to have looked into that wardrobe. It's my treat."

Pop Hicks shook his head, laughing:

"No, no, Norm, you don't get off with no treat this time. That story's too rich to keep, by gum! Tryin' to get my best man away, right under my nose, and never looked to see where I was. Well, you are a smart agent; ain't you? Lordy, how the boys will holler, when I tell 'em the story down at Sammy Booth's. Hi! hi! It'll last all through the winter."

Taylor winced perceptibly.

Sammy Booth was the leading show-printer for circus work, and his place was the rendezvous in winter of all the circus men, jolly fellows all, among whom Taylor was king.

"And round the corner at Mike's," continued Pop, chuckling. "What a time we'll have with Sammy, and Snedden, and Fred Keeler, and the rest of the boys, over the beer and pork pies. Hi! Taylor, but I wouldn't be in your place, when the boys begin to lallygag. You won't be able to show your face all winter."

Taylor winced worse. "Mike's" was the saloon round the corner, where men in the show business were found, every day in the year; and where show stories and beer were consumed in equal proportions, from noon till late at night.

Taylor had been the lion there for many a year, and he trembled at the thought of the jokes that would be cracked upon him, or made at his expense behind his back.

"Look here, Pop," he said, coaxingly. "I'll stand a supper on it, if you'll drop it. You haven't suffered by it—"

"No, nor I don't intend to," chuckled Pop, who seemed to have been restored to perfect content by the events of the day. "You can bet your bottom dollar that me and Mooney makes the most of that little check—"

"The check!" almost shrieked Taylor, and he made a dash at Moone.

Pop interposed and gave him a dig in the paunch with his elbow that sent Taylor staggering against the door, shaking the entire building.

"No ye don't," he cried. "That there check's drawed to Mooney's order, and I'm a-goin' to see he gits the money."

"But, good heavens," gasped Taylor, "it's getting it under false pretenses. It's flat robbery. It's only conditional. He was to join our show—"

"Where does it say so in the check?" asked Pop, curiously. "It says jest 'pay to the order of Charles H. Moone, five hundred and eighty-five dollars,' and it's signed 'George Leonard.' No conditions there. It's

a bribe straight from the word 'go,' and you know it, Norm Taylor. And the boy was smart enough to ketch ye! That's what's the matter!"

Taylor flushed and paled, and began to open the door, saying sullenly:

"All right. I'll stop it at the bank."

"You kin do that as much as you please," returned Pop, chuckling. "I'd rather ye would, 'cause I want to keep the check and put it in all the papers. Mooney'll write up the story, won't ye, Moone? Oh, it'll make rich readin', arter Onion George's letter. Norm Taylor, it's life and death 'tween us, and I can't throw away a chance."

Taylor made a gesture of despair.

"Great heavens man, what will you take to hush this up? I'll do anything."

Pop pointed his finger at him.

"Then leave the show," he said.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FINANCIAL CRISIS.

ONION GEORGE BOWNSSE was rubbing his hands over the month's account that same evening, while the show was in full progress, and was saying to his money-taker:

"Tommy, if things go on like this, we'll make something yet this season; and what we don't make one way we will another."

He had found that, after five weeks on the road, the show had a thousand dollars in the treasury over next week's expenses, and the gains had all accumulated within the last fortnight.

"And the best's to come yet," continued he, thoughtfully. "The best's to come yet. Those Virginny and Maryland towns is allurs safe to put us on the right side afore we turn into Ohio. Who'd have thought it? What luck I stumbled on those solid guys at Popokus! It's been a good deal of work and bother, but it's a-paying now, Tommy, it's a-paying now. Any letters, Tommy?"

Tommy Sykes, money-taker, handed him several, and the manager took them to the back end of the ticket-wagon, where he perused them attentively.

Suddenly he burst out into an explosion of blaspheming that actually startled Tommy, though he was used to hear swearing.

"When did he leave this letter?" he roared, shaking a letter furiously.

"What—what letter, sir?" asked Sykes, all in a tremor at the rage of his employer.

"This one—this from Taylor, gosh darn his fat carcass!" hissed the manager, white with fury. "By gosh, if I had him here, I'd bu'st his insides out of him, and give 'em to the Hyenas for supper, by gosh! When did he leave this, gosh darn him?"

Sykes was astounded and frightened at the sudden ebullition of rage, but managed to say:

"Mr. Taylor, sir? He—he came here—"

"When?" yelled Bownse, frantically.

"Gosh darn your stupid chunk of a head. You consarned cheese-eating lummo, can't you speak out? When?"

"This afternoon, sir, while the show was on, and left this letter. 'That's all I know,' cried Sykes, in terror. "I didn't think there was anything wrong, sir. He didn't say a word but to give that to you this evening."

"There, there; that'll do, Tommy. I don't blame you at all. I'm going 'round to the hotel, if any one wants me before the show's out."

And he got out of the wagon and went off to the hotel, the imprecations bubbling from his lips all the way, till the very violence of his fury exhausted him.

Then he read the letter again in his room:

"MR. G. B. BOWNSSE:—"

"DEAR SIR:—Circumstances over which I have no control, including the state of my health, compel me to resign my position as advance manager of your show. My contract, as you are aware, was with Mr. Leonard, who has this day refused to go on with it any further. If you want a good advance man I can conscientiously recommend you Mr. Charles H. Moone, of the Hicks show. He will be open to an engagement next season. I am sorry to say that Mr. Leonard seems to be much incensed against you for some cause or other, and I recommend that you go and see him at once. He is at present in the Tompkins House, in this town."

"Yours truly,"

"NORMAN J. TAYLOR."

Onion George stared at the letter in a stupor, now his rage was cooled. It had seemed to him at first like a hoax, what he called "a fake," to put him in a passion; but

the letter was too coldly business-like to admit any such supposition.

At one fell swoop he had lost his successful advance manager, and the news was announced to him that his financial backer was "incensed against him" for some unknown cause.

Poor Onion George had no Moone to turn to for advice, and for a little while felt utterly at a loss what to do.

At last he resolutely slammed his hat on his head and ejaculated:

"By gosh, may as well see what's to be done, by gosh! I'll go and see the guy, and find what he means."

He went off to the Tompkins House and asked for Leonard.

He found that George was there, and, from the respectful way in which Bownse was treated, he judged that the young millionaire was living high in the hotel, as in fact he was.

Mr. Leonard had taken a whole suite of apartments, and when Onion George was ushered in, he found the young man stretched on a sofa, smoking.

Leonard moved his head lazily as the manager entered, and accosted him at once with:

"Hallo! you're there, are you? Didn't Taylor tell you I wanted you at once?"

Had Onion George's reverence for wealth been any less than it was, he would have flared up at this address.

As it was, he swallowed his choler, and said, in the sweetest way:

"Why, no, Mr. Leonard; I only got his note just now, and he made no mention of your wanting me, though he advised me to see you. What is the trouble, sir? Anything wrong?"

Leonard did not offer to rise or motion his guest to a chair. He lay there, so sleek and insolent that Bownse had much ado to keep down his temper.

"Anything wrong?" he echoed. "By Jove, sir, I like that! Here I've advanced nearly ten thousand dollars to your show, and all I've got for it is a mud pelting from the cads at Quarry Center, and a virtuous letter from you, calling me all the names a man can be called. How's that?"

Bownse smiled his sweetest.

"You refer to my note in the papers? My dear sir, that's well understood to be show business. It's forgotten entirely. No one knows the name of the gentleman I spoke of, and, out here, no one ever heard of the thing."

"That's all very well," returned the young millionaire; "but you're making a mess of it all the time. That man Taylor's a fraud—"

"I agree with you," interrupted Bownse, warmly. "I wish I'd never seen his face. But he did well at first."

"He's made a worse mess of it than ever now," said Leonard. "He's let a check of mine get into the hands of the other party. You arranged the matter, and I signed the check at your instance. The man, Sun, Moon— What's his name?"

"Moone, you mean; the agent?"

"Yes, that's his name. Got my check into his hands; refuses to give it up. Threatens another scandal. I'm sick of it all. I've told them to pay the check, and I've done with you. I was a fool ever to go into it, and I wash my hands of it all."

For a few moments Bownse stared stupidly at him.

Then he stammered:

"You mean that—"

"That I give you the whole thing, and I shall back you no more," said Leonard, angrily. "You and Stone are a pair of swindlers. Between you, you have robbed me of ten thousand dollars. Now clear out. I want no more to do with you."

Bownse was used to insolence. He suffered and returned it—the first from his superiors in riches, the second to poorer men than himself.

He was as humble as could be, and only asked gently:

"Does Mr. Stone know of this?"

Leonard looked uneasy for the first time, and Bownse saw it.

"That's none of your business," he said, snappishly. "He's away on some wild goose-chase, and when he comes back he will know it."

Bownsse saw that the man before him feared Stone for some reason, and took his decision at once.

He rose up, respectful but firm.

"You've said *your* say, Mr. Leonard," he answered, quietly; "now hear mine. You have entered into a contract which you cannot violate without being liable in damages. I shall hold you to it at any hazard, and when Mr. Stone comes back I am sure he will support me. The law, sir, will give me my rights."

Leonard was about to answer when the door was unceremoniously opened and Stone entered, looking flushed and angry as he strode up to Leonard.

"What's this I hear?" he said, sternly. "Is it possible you're going to back out now, when victory is in our hands? Taylor tells me a fine story about you. By Jove! George, you're not fit to take care of yourself. I've countermanded all your orders—"

Leonard jumped up.

"How dared you—" he began, furiously, but Stone faced him down by sheer bravado, roaring:

"Sit down! Do you suppose I don't know my business? I say I've *countermanded your orders!* What you want's nerve, and, by Heavens! I've got enough for us both. Taylor shall *not* go; the exposure shall *not* take place—no, by Heavens, if we have to tear this check from that little scamp's dead body! Do you understand me, Leonard? *I mean it!*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. MOONE LOSES A TRICK.

THE two shows had left Charlestown in company, as usual, and little Moone had gone ahead, full of work. The check, over which so much bad blood had been wasted, was safe in Pop Hicks's breast-pocket, not to be used unless the warfare should be renewed under Taylor's auspices.

But Mr. Taylor had disappeared, and in his place no less a person than Mr. Stone had gone ahead; and Moone smiled to himself when he saw the well-dressed gambler making the rounds of the papers, and visiting bill-posters' dirty offices, trying to do the work of advance agent.

He had no fears of Stone.

After he had been out three days, however, he received a telegram from Pop, saying:

"Taylor has broken his word. I'm going to publish the affair."

Moone nodded and frowned when he read the message, and said to himself:

"So much the worse for them. The story I wrote is enough to knock any show."

He was curious to know how Taylor had broken his word, and was on the point of telegraphing back from Wheeling, where he was, to ask particulars, when he was surprised to receive a note from Mr. Stone, who was in the same hotel, asking to see him.

Quite confident of his ability to cope with the new agent, he sent word that he "would see the gentleman," and Stone soon after walked in.

With a charming smile, which he could assume on occasion, the gambler offered his hand, saying frankly:

"Mr. Moone, we're on opposing shows, but that's no reason why we should not be on good terms socially. Business is one thing, pleasure another. Do you smoke?"

"Not before dinner, thank you," said Moone, coldly, declining the proffered cigar.

Stone put it back in the case with a courteous wave of the hand.

"Sorry. Not before dinner? Well, what do you say to dining with me, then? I can promise you some excellent wine."

"Thanks, but I never drink wine on my business trips," said Moone.

"Well, you'll dine with me at least," said Stone, persistently smiling.

"Thanks, but I intended to dine at the next town," was the frigid reply.

Stone laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, you're a curious fellow. You won't eat, drink, or smoke with me. Where do you intend to dine then?"

"At Cohock Station," said Moone, a little incautiously, as he afterward thought.

Stone nodded and smiled.

"Curious! The very town I'm going to make, too. I say, suppose I drive you up there. There's enough money for both shows,

and as long as we share alike, we needn't snarl at each other. I've got the handsomest tandem you ever saw. Come, say you will."

Moone shook his head.

"Sorry to disoblige; but I've no time to drive. Your people keep me busy, and I have to hurry. I take the train."

"Well, I'll engage you don't lose time," said Stone, coaxingly. "You see, the fact is, I'll make a clean breast of it. I'm not used to this business yet, and I'm only doing it for fun. Next season I hope to be with a larger show, in which I put some money. You see I'm only learning the business now, and I've seen so much of your work and admire it so much, that, by Jove, I want to try to steal a few points from you."

Moone smiled. The explanation was so perfectly in accord with the ignorance of show business displayed by Stone, that he accepted it at once.

"Well," he said, "if that's what's the matter, sir, I'll give you all the points in my power, so long as you don't use them against me."

"Oh, no, honor bright," ejaculated Stone. "To tell the truth, I couldn't, ye know, for I'm entirely at your mercy. You might stuff me with all sorts of stories."

Little Moone thought to himself:

"You bet I will."

Aloud, he said:

"My dear sir, I see you're green. I was green myself once. Every man has to begin, some time. I would not willfully deceive you. It would be unfair, and not at all to my credit."

This was said with the gravest of faces, and Stone at once replied:

"Then you'll come with me?"

Moone shrugged his shoulders.

"If you insist. I'd as soon ride at your expense as at any other man's."

Stone laughed, and slapped him on the back, observing:

"You're a knowing little chap. I like you. 'Pon my soul I do."

Then he went off, and Moone packed his little traveling-bag, thinking:

"This fellow's a regular flat, to think I would give him points to fight *me*. Probably he wants to coax or bribe me into their service. If so, I'll take all the money he gives me, and fool him. Once is enough to give up five hundred and eighty dollars."

He went down and found Stone waiting in a tandem dog-cart, that he had not boasted of too highly, for it was a perfectly neat and splendidly appointed concern.

To say that it was Leonard's is needless, for Stone's powers of suction were practically unlimited.

Stone waved his whip courteously, motioned Moone to a seat beside him, and then said, cheerfully:

"You won't refuse a cigar *now*, I hope?"

Moone laughed.

"Well, no. Thank you."

He took the cigar and lighted it as they dashed off at a slashing trot.

Out of Wheeling they went at twelve miles an hour, and were soon in the wild mountain roads leading to Cohock Station, when Moone began to feel a little giddy and sick, and threw away his cigar, saying:

"Your cigars are too strong for me. I am not used to smoking such."

Stone seemed vexed, but said nothing on the subject till they had ridden a few miles further, when the sick feeling passed off from Moone, and the gambler said, in a careless way:

"Better try another cigar, now. I've a much milder brand in the box under the seat. Try one."

"Thank you," returned Moone dryly. "Once is enough. I won't smoke till we get to the station."

"Take a drink, then," said Stone, in a good-natured way, and he hauled a bottle from under the seat. "It's the best French brandy."

Moone inclined his head.

"Certainly; but after you is manners. That might be too strong likewise."

Stone looked at him keenly for an instant out of the corner of his eye, and then nodded admiringly, saying:

"Well, you *are* a cautious man. I believe you think I want to drug and rob you."

Moone laughed heartily.

"Never thought of such a thing. Why, man, I'm not worth robbing. My whole baggage is in this bag, and you can look over it at your leisure."

So saying, he coolly began to unpack it; when Stone suddenly pulled up his horses in a lonely part of the road, seized the little man by the collar and said savagely:

"Yes, you're smart, cursed smart; but not so smart as you think. *I've* fooled you this time. Give me that check, or by the Heaven above us I'll choke you and throw you down the next ravine. Do you hear?"

The powerful six-footer shook the little agent in a manner that showed Moone he was but a child in the hands of Stone; but his pluck never failed him, and he looked his foe in the eye fearlessly, saying:

"The check's not here. Do you suppose I'm a fool? Pop Hicks has it, and if I'm not on hand to-morrow, he'll know that you've played foul and come hunting for you with Lion Charley. Let go my collar, sir. I tell you I've not got it."

Stone shook him violently.

"You lie, you have, and I'm going to get it out of you. Empty your pockets."

Moone actually laughed in his face.

"I'll do that with pleasure," he said. "It's so refreshing to meet a man like you, who wastes time over a minnow when he might have a salmon. Let go my collar, and I'll empty them. You needn't fear I'll run away. I'm going to the station with you since you invited me so politely."

"Empty them out, then," said Stone, biting his lips at his inability to return sarcasm for sarcasm with this little shred of a man who had so much cheek. "Here, get out of the cart and let me see all you have."

Moone got out, and quietly emptied all his pockets, with their varied assortment of contract blanks, newspaper clippings, bills and cuts, copy for advertisements and notices, and some little money. He let Stone examine each piece, and passed him up a dirty towel and pocket-comb among other articles, remarking:

"They don't go well with your rig, sir; but they're useful in country places."

Finally Stone saw that he had told the truth, and the gambler swore a bitter oath and dealt the little man a savage cut with his tandem-whip as he cried:

"Go to the devil then, you little scamp! Find your way out of the mountains if you can. I'll have *that* satisfaction out of you, anyhow, curse you!"

And he drove away full speed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STONE'S PLOT.

MR. BOWN SSE was pacing up and down the ring of his empty tent after the morning rehearsal in a brown study, his hands in his pockets, two days after little Moone had been turned loose in the West Virginia mountains.

The hands had gone to dinner, and G. B. B. was reflecting on the fact that Leonard, while he had not adhered to his refusal to go on with his contract in face of Stone's bluster, had yet cut off supplies for a time, and insisted that all moneys in the treasury should be applied to the payment of expenses before he would advance another cent.

And Mr. Bownsse was calculating, at the moment, how he could best increase the expenses to draw money out of his unwilling partner.

The show had done badly for two days, and Elephant Jim was off on another "tear," similar to the one which had ended in his dismissal from Pop Hicks's show; while King Philip, released from his master's care, with his burns healed, gave visible tokens of "going on the rampage" again.

Bownsse was in a brown study about all these things and feeling at his worst, when he heard Stone's voice outside inquiring for him, and the gambler walked into the tent, flushed and triumphant-looking, to say:

"Bownsse, we've got them at last. Here, I want to talk to you alone."

He took the manager to one side, and began in a low, eager tone:

"No more trouble from Moone. I've got him fixed so he won't disturb us for three weeks at least, if he ever comes back."

Bownsse started violently.

"Good heavens, man, what do you mean? No foul play, I hope? That won't do."

Stone laughed sardonically.

"No, only a trick. He's up in the mountains, in the hands of a party of moonshiners, and they think he's a revenue detective. They'll hold him, you bet."

Then he told the way in which he had enticed Moone into a drive through the solitary mountain roads, and concluded:

"I left him in the road, and I knew he would try to walk to Cohock Station. I had my men all fixed for him about a mile further on; and Pop Hicks won't have a bill up or a dodger out in any town on the road till he finds out that Moone's gone. Where's Taylor?"

Bownse shook his head.

"Gone again. Pop spotted him and had the story all ready to put into the papers, when Taylor weakened in earnest, and has gone off to New York. He left all the work cut out for you; but you'll have to do it, or the show will go up."

Stone bit his lips.

"That's all right. I can do it well enough; but I want to do something else. How's the show going?"

"Slim, slim, cursed slim. King Philip's on the rampage again, and Jim's on a tear. We've had to put the chains on."

Stone uttered an impatient curse.

"I wish the brute would keep his work for the other show. I say, Bownse."

"Well?"

"If he gets loose again and goes for the other show, we're not to blame, are we?"

Bownse looked at him with a peculiar expression, as he said, dryly:

"I thought you'd had enough of elephant driving. I suppose you know he hasn't forgiven you?"

"Who hasn't? Jim?"

"Ay, ay, Jim—and, for the matter of that, King Philip too. You see you tried to punish him, and he got out. He'll know you, and remember that."

Stone affected to be incredulous.

"Oh, nonsense. I've been round him more than once since that, and he has never offered to hurt me. I'll risk him."

Bownse shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. What do you want to do?"

Stone took him to one side and whispered to him for a long time, the manager's face expressing all sorts of emotions during the recital, fear being the most prominent.

When Stone had finished Bownse said:

"You'll have to take the risk, Stone. I won't stay here myself. If you want to come any such games, count me out. I'll sell my share to you, but that's all I'll do. It's not safe to do what you propose."

Stone sneered at him.

"You want nerve, that's all. I tell you it's a safe card to play; and if it succeeds they're ruined."

Bownse shook his head.

"I don't want no part in it. I've got a family to take care of, Mr. Stone, and I don't want no coroner's inquest over me."

"Well, then, go away to the next town and leave me to manage the show for tonight," said Stone, roughly. "I tell you I'm going to smash up that show if it brings me to State's Prison."

"That's where it's darned likely to land you," replied Bownse, still more dryly. "I tell you it can't be done. You can't do it."

"Can't I? I'll show you whether I can or not. Where's Jim?"

Bownse sighed.

"Lord knows. I hope he'll be on at the afternoon show, but I ain't confident. If he don't come, I'll have to keep King Philip in his stable."

"You won't do any such thing," retorted Stone. "Sooner than lose him, I'll perform the beast myself."

Bownse stared at him.

"You? He'd kill you sure!"

"Would he? Come to his stable and see."

Stone walked across the ring to the stable where King Philip stood, alone in his glory, secured with strong chains.

The animal looked sleepy and quiet, but had a sullen fire in its eye that boded no good to its disturber.

"Don't go near him," said Bownse, in an earnest tone. "You ain't used to him."

Stone's only reply was to take up a pitch-

fork and advance fearlessly on the elephant, which he rated in the savage way he had heard practiced by Jim Perkins, and ordered to "move over." King Philip raised his trunk to make a slap at his disturber, when Stone prodded it with the pitchfork, and assaulted the beast so violently, swearing and shouting all the time, that King Philip shambled over as he was bid, evidently cowed by the man's daring.

"Now," said Stone, triumphantly, "you see I've not been round this show for nothing, Mr. Bownse. I've been studying this brute for weeks, and I never let anything master me, long. If Jim don't come to time to-day, I perform the elephant. That will bring Master Jim to his senses, hey?"

Bownse gazed on Stone with a wonder and respect that found voice in the words:

"Well, you're grit, ain't you? I didn't think he would have let you into his stall."

Stone laughed and jabbed in the fork again, driving King Philip round, just as he had seen Jim do, and then came out of the stall, saying proudly:

"I told you I could do it, and I've done it. Now, Mr. Bownse, maybe you'll believe I can execute the plan I told you about."

Bownse looked decidedly uneasy.

"Yes, yes, I believe it," he said hastily; "but for heaven's sake, don't do it. I know you're a good man, and you've got the grit of the best; but you don't know what those beasts are when they get going. He may obey you now; but if he gets into a regular tantrum, Elephant Jim himself couldn't stop the mischief."

Stone shrugged his shoulders and lighted a cigar, saying obstinately:

"I don't care a curse for Elephant Jim. I'm going to do as I said. If you're afraid, take the train for the next station. I manage this show in reality, as you know, by virtue of Leonard's money. Refuse to let me have my own way, and you can manage him yourself. You know whether you can get any money out of him, without me to back you."

Bownse winced, for he knew the daring gambler spoke the truth.

He turned apologetic at once, saying:

"I know that, Stone. Me and you's in the same boat. I'll do as you say; I'll go on to the next town and get ready for ye. But let me have my own way in one thing."

"What's that?" asked Stone.

"Pack up and move off, before you do it."

The gambler seemed to be struck by the words, for he answered cheerfully:

"A good idea. If he breaks loose on the road, it's no one's fault if he comes back to his old quarters. On my word, Bownse, you have some head on your shoulders, after all."

Bownse nodded his head emphatically.

"You'll find out I have; and maybe, after it's too late, Mr. Stone; but all I've got to say is—look out for Jim!"

Stone laughed scornfully.

"Jim be hanged! I've cowed him before and I can cow him again. I know his secret of elephant-driving. It's all bluster and nerve, and I give in to no man on nerve, my friend."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RINGMASTER'S DREAM.

NIGHT had settled over the little town of Lovenville, and Pop Hicks was rubbing his hands and saying to his old friend, Professor Rabbetts:

"Luck's turned again, professor. This week's more'n paid expenses. But I can't think what's become of Moone."

"Oh, I suppose the gentleman will turn up after a while," returned Rabbetts, coldly. "He's got a way of surprising people. It's his business, you know."

"Yes, and he does it darned well," said Pop, cheerfully. "Well, Rabbetts, I'm going home, by gum! I sha'n't move till daylight, and we'll give all hands a rest."

It was after the show when this talk took place, and Rabbetts remarked, pointing to the vacant place lately occupied by the Bownse tents.

"They've moved out, and they'll have the best place at the next town, I suppose you know, Mr. Hicks."

"I'm running this show," was the dry answer. "When the luck turns, it's as well to give it a chance."

And Pop went away in one direction, while Rabbetts departed in another.

It was a lovely moonlight night in the month of August, and the professor thought he would take a stroll in the suburbs of Lovenville before he went to bed.

The other show people, whose physical hard work always tired them, had gone to bed in their vans at the close of the show, expecting to go on as usual, and the drivers, whose business at other times was to harness up and get on the road, had celebrated the indulgence granted them by Pop, by going to the nearest groggery to have a little drunk of their own.

Perfect silence rested on the show, for the cages were covered up and the horses were all asleep in their stalls as Rabbetts walked away.

The higher salaried performers, such as Noble, Tom Fowler and the ladies, glad to exchange their narrow berths in the van for a civilized couch, had gone to the hotel—the only one in Lovenville—and the drivers and canvas-men were the only people left in charge.

The little professor was something of a poet in his way, and enjoyed the beauty of the night as he strolled off to smoke a peaceful cigar on the country road.

He went about a quarter of a mile to a grassy knoll which commanded a view of the country for some distance, with the winding streams of the infant rivers that make the landscape at that corner of the Union so charming, and sat down to smoke and muse.

Even the ringmaster of a circus thinks sometimes, and Professor Rabbetts, with all his pompous ways, had a good head, and thought considerably; for he was not a common ringmaster.

He was getting old, and pondering as does many a man in the show business, on what a mistake he had made in entering it.

"If I'd only taken to the law," he said to himself, as he sat down with his elbows on his knees and puffed gloomily away, "what a career I might have had! I might be taking my hundred-dollar fees for a speech, instead of announcing acts at fifteen dollars a week and board. I might be called 'Counselor' or 'Judge,' instead of 'Old Rab,' and I might— But what's the use of thinking now? I'm in the ring and can't get out."

He smoked away gloomily awhile, till insensibly the beauty of the scene soothed him to repose, and he was nodding, half-asleep, so that his cigar dropped from his mouth and he started awake.

"Nearly asleep," he muttered; "too hot to go in. May as well doze her."

The little man forgot all about the dangers of night dews and malaria, as he stretched himself, fully intending to take only a few winks.

When he closed his eyes, the moon, in her third quarter, was just above the lower branches of the trees under which he lay down, and he fell fast asleep, to wake up with a start and find the said moon high in the heavens.

For a few moments he was confused as to his locality, for a strong odor, such as pervaded the show when the cages were open, was all round him, and Rabbetts thought he was in the stables, till the nodding foliage over his head undeceived him.

The odor he smelled was the well-known effluvia of wild beasts!

For a moment the little man was about to start up, and then he turned his head to one side, as he heard a slight noise near him.

The sight he saw nearly caused him to faint dead away, and as it was, he lay still, sweating at every pore.

Within twenty feet of the ringmaster was the enormous head of King Philip, the vicious elephant that he remembered so well, and the great brute was alone and entirely unfettered!

To say Rabbetts was frightened is to understate the case.

He was completely demoralized.

He had always feared the ill tempered brute, and King Philip had often made him scutter out of the ring, double quick, in pure malicious sport, till the poor ringmaster had positively refused to announce Jim Perkins,

unless he kept Philip out of the arena till he was through.

And here was the elephant, loose, close to him, without a soul near him.

So Rabbetts thought, at least, in the few seconds, that seemed to him an age, during which he lay there, sweating and palsied with justifiable fear.

Then he heard a rough voice say, in low, guarded tones:

"Get on, you brute, get on!"

Then came the thud of a goad, striking the elephant, and King Philip uttered a sulky grunt, and went off at his usual sweeping trot, followed by a man dressed in Jim Perkins's green velvet and gold-laced ring-suit.

Away they went down the road toward Lovenville, the man running after the beast, and every time the elephant stopped the man goaded him on.

When they were fairly out of hearing, Rabbetts rose up, feeling very shaky, and rubbed his eyes, muttering:

"Good heavens, am I awake? Who was that man? It was not Jim. Not big enough."

So much he had seen in the moonlight, and he also saw that the man was not in full control over King Philip.

Every now and then the huge brute would wheel round on his pursuer, and threaten to charge, when the man assaulted him fiercely, and always ended in driving the beast onward.

Rabbetts watched them with great interest and anxiety, till, all of a sudden, his ears were saluted with a new sound.

It was the loud neigh of a horse, coming from the opposite direction.

Looking round, he saw a yellow road-cart, which he recognized as Bownse's, that he used for advance work.

It was coming down the road, driven by a man, whom he recognized, in the moonlight, as one of the stable hands at the Bownse show.

The cart was evidently following the elephant at a respectful distance, in waiting for the driver.

"Well, this is strange!" muttered the little ringmaster, as he instinctively got close to the tree. "What can it mean?"

While he was wondering, the man in the cart whipped up the horse and trotted on at a more rapid pace.

Rabbetts instinctively turned to look the other way, and saw the man in green velvet coming back at a walk.

Beyond him lay the white tents of Pop Hicks's show, and the horrified ringmaster distinctly perceived the huge hulk of the elephant, close to the tents, trotting round them, with his trunk up, a sure sign of one of his "tantrums."

Then, on the silence of the night, in perfect distinctness, came the well-known angry trumpet of the animal, to be followed in a moment by a pandemonium of noise, as the wild beasts inside heard it and scrambled up, roaring, while the terrified squeals of the horses showed that a regular panic was going on in the show.

Forgetting all caution in his horror at the diabolical scheme to which he was a witness, the ringmaster ran out from the shelter of the tree, as hard as he could go, toward the tents, screaming as he ran:

"Help! help! King Philip's loose!"

A moment before, he had been sweating with fear; now the generous instinct of saving others had overcome his fears, and he ran into certain peril, without a thought of himself.

His cries alarmed the man in the road-cart, who instantly turned round the vehicle and fled, while the man in green velvet came tearing toward him, crying savagely:

"Shut up, curse ye, shut up!"

Rabbetts was already cool enough to notice that the tones of the man's voice showed terror as well as anger, and the ringmaster ran on, yelling louder than ever:

"Help! Murder! MURDER!!!"

The man instantly rushed for him, and Rabbetts saw he was a big fellow, with whom he could not hope to cope.

He continued his outcries louder than before, running straight for the show, which was now full of confusion, and the man came up with him and leveled a tremendous blow at him.

The ringmaster dodged and ran, the man

in green velvet behind him, the one screaming, the other cursing, till they were close to the tent, when such a racket arose that both instinctively paused.

King Philip had overturned several vans, and now was pursuing a white pony, which had broken loose and was running straight for the stables, from the van to which it had been tied.

Into the tent ran the pony, and the elephant, with a wild scream of fury, rushed after it.

Then came a demoniacal howling and yelling, inside the tent, as King Philip smashed the wild beasts' cage all to pieces in his head-long rush, and the next moment rose the cry:

"Run! Run! The lions are loose!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DEMORALIZED SHOW.

THE terrible clamor of the beasts had actually stilled the rage of the man in green velvet, who was chasing Rabbetts; and he turned to run away, when the little ringmaster shouted fearlessly:

"Come back, you wretch! Come back, if you are not a villain. Help us part these animals! Are you a coward, too?"

The man hesitated and paused for an instant, when the noise inside was redoubled and aided by the shouts of the excited circus men, who came running up, half-dressed, from the hotels and vans, all yelling together.

They roared to the man in velvet:

"Jim! Jim! Go in! Call him off!"

Then came a crashing and rushing inside the tent, and out rushed twenty or thirty horses, squealing wildly with terror, in a regular stampede, blinded and frantic.

They dashed straight through the crowd of men, some perfectly free of harness, others with broken halter ropes trailing behind them, knocking down every one in their course, huddled close together in a compact body, and rushed off down the road at the wild speed of a stampede, the clatter of hoofs growing fainter and fainter as they disappeared in the dim distance.

The next moment out of the tent came the white pony, trying to follow, with a tiger clawing at its haunches.

The poor beast staggered a few steps and fell, when another tiger came gliding stealthily forward, and both ferocious beasts stood snarling at each other over the dying horse.

The tableau was broken almost instantly by the entrance of the four lions, and all the beasts stood growling and snarling at each other over the body, while the circus men recoiled in terror, and ran to secure some sort of weapons.

Little Rabbetts afterward declared he would never forget the sight of that dark opening of the white tent in the moonlight, with the savage brutes fighting over the poor pony.

It was terribly sublime, but particularly uncomfortable for near spectators.

They hung back, and then some one called out to Rabbetts:

"Where's Elephant Jim? He was here a moment ago. Where is he?"

They all began to shout together:

"Jim! Jim!"

The man in green velvet had disappeared. Only Rabbetts had seen him sneak off, and the ringmaster had been too much absorbed to notice him much.

And all this while King Philip, after his first burst of fury in the tent, had been silent, and no one could tell at what moment he would break out again, or from what quarter.

Then a silence fell on the circus men as the beasts began to tear the pony into pieces and drag them away, growling and fighting all the time.

No one knew what to do. Pop Hicks and Lion Charley were in the hotel, a good quarter of a mile away, and the canvas-men and drivers did not care to go near the beasts.

Suddenly they heard a shouting down the street, and two men came up, running at full speed.

The one ahead was in his shirt-sleeves, and the moonlight glittered on the big diamonds in front of his ruffles, though he was bare-headed, and had cast aside coat and vest as he ran.

Some one called out:

"By gosh! it's Elephant Jim! Who was the other man?"

It was indeed Elephant Jim, in all his splendor of rich clothing, of which he was as fond as a gambler. He had been on a terrible spree for two days, had been dead drunk at the afternoon show, and had been awakened up by the noise in the tent.

Now he came tearing on, looking like a maniac, his face pale as death, his wild eyes glaring, running so fast, with his long stride, that the man behind him could not come near him, though he was Lion Charley, who could run like a deer, as a general thing.

Elephant Jim came running on, straight as an arrow, toward the tent, and as he drew near he shouted to the other men in his wild way:

"Whoop! Clear out of that! I'm Elephant Jim, and I kin whip any man in this show, by gosh! Whoop!"

"Look to your beast then," cried the professor, in his loudest tones. "Don't stand howling at us, but show if you're a man. There he comes!"

There was a wild, angry trumpet, and King Philip made his appearance, rushing out of the show at another entrance, making straight for the group of men, who scattered with great haste.

Elephant Jim saw his beast, and instantly rushed forward, waving his arms wildly, and roaring:

"Back, ye old thief! Back! Don't ye know your master, gosh darn ye? Back, I say!"

To his horror and amazement, King Philip, for answer to the shout, trumpeted louder, and made for him with such desperate ferocity that Elephant Jim only escaped instant death by skipping to one side and running to the hindquarters of the furious but clumsy beast.

The circus men, seeing Jim's danger, raised a yell to divert Philip's attention, and the next moment up came Lion Charley, who ran past Perkins, crying:

"Get a fork, man! I'll help! Drive him off, on your life!"

Forks were plentiful enough round the show, and Elephant Jim, seeming well-nigh crazy with rage, yet accepted the advice and followed Lion Charley.

Then was seen the singular spectacle of two men, in their shirt-sleeves, fighting an enraged elephant with nothing but pitchforks, and facing him as boldly as if he were only a calf.

Elephant Jim went at him, cursing and howling; Lion Charley made no noise, but exhibited the most activity and wickedness of the two men.

When the elephant slapped at them with his trunk, both men met the blow with the point of the pitchforks held with great strength and skill, so that King Philip roared aloud with baffled rage and pain, and held his trunk curled up over his head, to keep it out of harm's way, while he charged with his tusks.

Both men evaded the charge with seeming ease by leaping aside, and each was sure to jab King Philip in the soft skin of his belly as he rushed past in his blind fury.

The contest was so absorbing that none of the parties remembered they were near the carnivorous beasts, till King Philip, in one of his rushes, came tearing right into the midst of the growling group, and was at once set upon by tigers and lions alike, tearing and clawing.

Frantic with pain and demoralized by the surprise, the great brute wheeled round and went off at his best speed down the road from whence he had come, roaring all the way and shaking off lions and tigers like so many kittens as he went, when Lion Charley shouted to Elephant Jim:

"Let him go, man, let him go. We'll find him to-morrow. We'll have all we can do to cage the rest."

This was self-evident, as the animals shaken off by King Philip came crouching and gliding swiftly back to the pony, snarling savagely at the bystanders, as much as to say:

"Interfere with us at your peril."

Lion Charley did not intend to do any such thing. He knew better.

He had got rid of the disturbing elephant, and he knew that the lions and tigers would

not leave the carcass of the pony, while it would not be safe for any one, even himself, to go near them while they were feeding, till they were quite satiated with blood and flesh.

Elephant Jim looked dazed and stupid. He saw Lion Charley, saw the men in the show, and seemed not to understand where he was, now that quiet was restored.

"Where's Bownse?" he asked, vaguely looking around him at the men.

"You're not in Bownse's show," said Pop Hicks, who had just come upon the scene. "This is *my* show, Jim Perkins, and God forgive you for this night's work."

"Not Bownse's show? My God, then where am I? How came Philip here? My God, Pop, have I got 'em at last?"

"Got what? The jim-jams?" asked Pop, excitedly. "My gum, you ought to have 'em, and go and bust your darned brains out on a rock! Look what you've done, arter all I've done for you, Jim! You've ruined me in one night."

Indeed, so it seemed, from the looks of what was left of the show.

Wagons and vans overturned and broken; the lions and tigers loose; the interior of the tent a scene of hideous confusion, when they entered it, avoiding the group of beasts; and, in the midst of all, the cage of monkeys, all smashed to bits by King Philip, the poor little creatures trampled to a jelly in the ruins of their house by the malicious monster.

No wonder Pop Hicks, in his desperation, cried aloud to Jim Perkins:

"God in heaven forgive you for what you've done, Jim, for I'll never, never forgive you! Go! go! I'm ruined!"

Elephant Jim seemed to be sobered by the sight, for he ceased to look wild, and said, apologetically:

"No, Pop, by gosh! ye ain't ruined at all, as long as I'm alive. I had no hand in this; I swear it."

"How d'd you come here, then?" cried Pop, still more excitedly, for he thought Jim was adding insult to injury. "Your show left the place four hours ago—yes—five—and here you are back with your cursed elephant smashing things for me, as if it wasn't enough you'd sold out to the other show at the beginning of the season. By gum! Jim Perkins, hangin's too good for you! You ought to be thrown to them beasts!"

Jim looked round him stupidly.

"My show gone! Then who druv Philip here? I've been abed since—here, Noble—you know where I was. I leave it to you."

Lion Charley, in his even, passionless tones, replied at once:

"Certainly I know where you were. You were dead drunk at noon to-day, and I put you to bed in the hotel myself. You lay down in your clothes, and it was I roused you when we heard the muss."

Here one of the men uttered a cry of surprise.

"Then who in blazes performed King Philip? for he was on afternoon and evening."

Jim uttered a perfect shriek of rage.

"Handled *my* elephant! Show me the man and I'll pound the life out of him!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAGING THE LIONS.

PROFESSOR RABBITTS here raised his voice:

"I can tell you that, I think."

Everybody looked at the little ringmaster in surprise, and Pop asked:

"You? Why, what do you know about it?"

Thus urged, the little professor told his story in his usual grandiloquent way, concluding by saying:

"He was a large man, but not as big as you, Mr. Perkins. He had on your ring-dress of green and gold, and Bownse's cart was waiting for him behind, driven by Tom Pride. I recognized *his* face. Who the other man was I don't know, but he drove the elephant down to this show, sir, yes, down to this show. And when I shouted for help, sir, he ran at me to kill me—yes, sir, to kill me, I conscientiously believe. And when this trouble was at its height, sir, he fled—yes, sir, fled like a coward. But I can swear to

his face in any court, sir, though I'm not sure I've ever seen him before. But I think I have—yes, sir, I think I have."

Here Lion Charley asked, in his quiet way:

"Where do you think you've seen him?"

Rabbitts hesitated.

"I don't know—I'm not sure; but I *think* it is the same man that was put out of our show at Popokus for raising a disturbance."

Jim Perkins had been listening hungrily, and now he burst into a yell:

"*That* man! Gosh darn his ugly picter, I'll fix him for it."

"Then go and do it, and don't talk about it," interposed Lion Charley, quietly. "It's the same man, and his name's Stone."

Jim looked round him in despair for a moment, muttering:

"And I'm all alone here. Who'll help me catch King Philip?"

"Help me cage my beasts, and we'll all help you," answered Lion Charley. "Now's your time, Jim, to show what you're made of. Your brute did the mischief. You're the man to help."

Jim's only answer was:

"Give your orders. I ain't used to this kind of beast, but you know your business."

Lion Charley held out his hand.

"Do as I tell you, and I'll say you're a man. Let's see to the cages first."

They hunted up the remnants of the big cage, and found it less damaged than they had expected.

King Philip, in his charge, had upset it, and burst the doors open, but beyond that it was still safe to hold the beasts.

They dragged it outside as near to the animals as they dared, the bright moonlight assisting them very materially in their work.

The cage containing the tigress and her cubs had escaped, and they found the two leopards hiding under the broken seats in a corner of the tent, not daring to go out and join the larger beasts, though they crept as close as they thought safe, and eyed the feast hungrily.

Lion Charley called all hands to form a great circle, impressing the services of the hundreds of townspeople who had come flocking out of their beds, attracted by the noise.

He instructed them to remain quiet, unless the beasts approached them, when they were to shout together in chorus and frighten them back.

Then he lighted his furnaces and heated a large quantity of irons, after which he ordered the cage to be backed close to the animals.

By this time the unfortunate pony was almost devoured, and several of the animals were standing still, glaring around them and licking their chops.

"Now's the time," said the lion-tamer in a low voice to Jim. "Come on, and do as I do."

The two men took up one of the little furnaces by the long handles, each carrying one of the glowing irons in his other hand, and carried the apparatus boldly toward the lions and tigers.

They were allowed to get within nearly forty feet, when one of the tigers, still unsatiated, made a snarling rush toward them, open-mouthed.

"Drop it," said Charley, quietly.

In half a second the furnace was down, and both men faced the tiger, an iron in each hand.

"Back, sir, back!" commanded the lion-tamer, in cold, even tones. "Into the cage, sir, quick!"

The tiger paused in its rush, to crouch for a spring, when Lion Charley, quick as a flash, ran in and planted both irons on the beast's nose.

With a howl of fear and pain the tiger turned and ran, with the instinct of long training, to the only place of refuge it knew—the open cage.

"Charge!" cried Charley. "Back! back, into the cage, all of you! In! in!"

Elephant Jim kept with him, pace by pace, as they charged the collection of brutes that had looked so formidable but a moment before; and, to the awe of the amazed townspeople, who stood looking on afar off, came a chorus of growls and yells, as the whole mob, like a flock of sheep, turned and huddled into the cage, following the demoraliz-

ed tiger, and crowding over each other, in their eagerness to escape the red-hot irons.

A moment later Lion Charley had pulled to the door, and passed a chain securely round the bars to replace the broken fastening.

Then he turned and called out:

"Bring the spare cage for the leopards. Let them go at what's left of the meat. They won't leave it."

His prophecy proved true. No sooner were the big beasts caged than the two leopards came gliding out like snakes from their hiding-place and fell on the remnants of the feast with an avidity that showed how hungry they were.

The spare cage—a small affair, used in shifting the animals—was brought out after a while, and rolled near to the leopards, which immediately began to drag away their pieces, as if they feared to be robbed, snarling all the while but evidently afraid.

Then the door was thrown open, and Lion Charley, manifesting no haste or excitement, picked up the remnants of the unfortunate pony that the leopards had left, and threw them ostentatiously into the open cage, so the beasts could see it.

Then he said to Jim:

"Come on and let's drive them in. They're slippery. Head 'em off if they start to run from you. Fresh irons."

The two men separated and maneuvered exactly as if they were trying to drive two skittish colts through a gate.

The leopards, small as they were, proved more troublesome than the big beasts, the more so that the cage was strange to them; but after a half-hour's active work they were safely housed at last, and Lion Charley said to Pop:

"Now, Mr. Hicks, if you'll attend to the repairs here, Jim and I will hunt up the stock and bring it back. This show's not dead yet; and let me tell you one thing, before the boys: I never went out with a show yet that didn't clear itself and come into quarters at last with a clear profit in the box. This night I'll show you Lion Charley's luck!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

LION CHARLEY and Elephant Jim left the show at once, while Pop Hicks was mournfully turning his attention to repairing damages, and took their way to the hotel.

Out of all the circus stock only one horse remained, the stout piebald that traveled in the road-cart, and that was safe simply because it had been put up at the hotel stable.

The two men got out the cart, harnessed up the piebald and drove back past the tent, where they found every one hard at work, with the cheerful resignation to disaster common among showmen, repairing damages and packing up to move though they had no teams to draw the wagons.

They had almost passed it when they heard some one behind them call out:

"Hi! hi! Charley! oh, Charley!"

"Looking round Elephant Jim exclaimed: 'Gosh darn my skin! if it ain't Sally Hicks and Flirt. Well, I'm glad the mare war'n't in the muss, too.'"

It was Sally herself, and she galloped up to say hurriedly:

"I couldn't stay behind. Pa didn't see me, I guess; he's so busy. You'll want all you can get."

Lion Charley shook his head.

"We don't want you. This is dangerous work, Miss Sally. You'd better go back."

"I won't go back," said the girl, obstinately. "I couldn't stand it at the hotel any more when I heard what was going on. Tom Fowler's saved his second ring horse and he'll be after me very soon. I tell you, you'll want all you can get. Here he comes. We ain't dead yet in this show. Cheer up."

Her tone was so pleasant and jolly, her gayety so contagious that Lion Charley could not resist a smile as he answered:

"Well, if you will, I suppose you must. But let Tom do the coaxing. We can't afford to lose you."

Here the clatter of hoofs announced the coming of Tom Fowler, the bareback rider, who came up to say as he passed:

"I'll go ahead and find Philip. That's the first, ain't it, Jim?"

"Yes," answered Jim, gloomily, 'ef ye

don't ye'll never get yer stock back, and when ye do, they'll be a muss, you bet."

Tom waved his hand and galloped away, while the piebald put on a good burst of trotting speed and took them for four good miles without a break.

Then they saw Tom Fowler's big gray, that had been nearly a mile ahead, on the road, halted, by something dark that lay in the middle of the roadway.

"By gosh!" muttered Jim, turning white, "he's struck somethin'."

He did not say another word till they came up, when he jumped out of the cart and ran to inspect the dark mass.

What it was, was hard to say at first, but they could distinguish a dead horse, a vehicle splintered to fragments, and the bodies of two men, all battered out of shape, in such a manner as to be utterly unrecognizable.

"He has caught them," said Lion Charley, in a low tone. "I wonder who they are?"

Here Sally, who had come up, cried out: "Why they're show people! Look! Good heavens, Jim, if you weren't standing there I'd say it was your ring-dress."

Jim turned his eyes slowly on Lion Charley.

"The gal's right," he said. "It's that snoozer Stone that wanted to drive elephants. He's got it now, pore feller."

"Then this is Bownse's wagon and the other man's Tom Pride," said Charley, musingly. "They've paid dear for their trick. But where's King Philip?"

Tom Fowler's voice was rather shaky as he answered:

"On ahead still, but I swear it's an ugly job to hunt him up to-night."

Lion Charley nodded.

"You're right, boy, it is; but it's got to be done, for all that. If you don't like it, go back. I sha'n't blame you."

"But I shall," interrupted Sally Hicks, her eyes flashing. "I came out to get my father's horses and I'm not going back without them. Come, Flirt."

So saying she galloped away straight down the road as hard as she could tear, and Lion Charley laid on his whip to follow, which he did for another four or five miles.

Tom Fowler, ashamed of his hesitation, raced ahead with Sally, and when next they halted it was on the top of a hill, to come tearing back full speed.

"They've struck him," said Jim, hurriedly. "Run on, if you don't want to lose the cart; turn him round and let him go."

Lion Charley instantly wheeled round the cart, tied the reins to the dashboard so they could not trail, and leaped out on one side, while Elephant Jim followed his example on the other.

They had brought with them a long coil of rope to noose the elephant, and they had barely time to lug it out to a tree by the roadside, when King Philip came tearing over the hill in hot pursuit of the two teasers, and the elephant-catchers prepared for their prey.

Presently Sally Hicks dashed past screaming:

"He's wrecked the other show! Kill him!"

Tom Fowler shouted excitedly:

"Bownse has gone to smash! Kill the brute! kill him!"

They hardly caught more than the words "kill him," when up ramped the monster, its head and fore-quarters streaming with blood, where the lions had clawed it, trumpeting with a savage energy no one had ever heard from it before, and so blind in its fury that it never saw Noble or Perkins.

The active tamers were able to rush out, one from each side of the road where big trees grew opposite, and had the nooses round Philip's hind legs in a trice, made of tough wire-rope, strong enough to support many tons.

Down fell Philip sprawling, and before he could rise, Jim was at one side of his head, Charley at the other.

The rest of the contest was but a more difficult and prolonged repetition of the fight in which the monster had once before been subdued.

When it was over, and King Philip lay stretched out and begging for mercy, the sun had risen, the men of several farm-houses round had gathered to see the fight, and one of them said in tones of great awe:

"Golly, mister, you all's terrible men to punish a beast like that, but if you go over the hill and see what he's done, you'll be sorry ye didn't kill him."

"Why, what's there?" asked Jim, wiping his brow, all traces of drunkenness gone.

"Come and see," said the farmer.

They followed him to the top of the hill and beheld a scene of devastation, compared to which the destruction effected in the Hicks show was a "flea-bite," so to speak.

It was evident that the elephant in his maniacal rage, with the diabolical malignity which distinguishes his kind in such fits, had surprised the caravan in full march on the road, had rushed at and upset van after van with his tusks, and had then turned on the helpless teams and had trampled them, one by one, into a shapeless mass of gory flesh, destroying the vans and wagons with almost human ingenuity and spite.

Horrified at the scene, the two tamers turned and went back, and nothing was said till they got near the prostrate elephant that had done the mischief.

Then Elephant Jim said in a gloomy kind of way:

"I suppose he's got to be killed, Charley."

Charley looked at King Philip closely and shook his head, saying:

"No. This settles the matter between Pop and Bownse for good and all. I told you once that I never went out with a show but what it ended the season with a full treasury. That's Lion Charley's luck, and it's never failed me yet."

Lion Charley's words proved true. The plot by which Stone had hoped to ruin the Hicks show had proved the cause of his own death and the complete destruction of the Bownse concern, with the financial collapse, utter and final, of Onion George.

Bownse himself and most of his people escaped uninjured from the attack of the elephant, which confined its rage to the horses and vans, but the show was in no condition for further service, and had to disband.

Pop Hicks, on the contrary, repaired his broken vans, recovered his horses, and was able to show again within three days, at the end of which time little Moone made his appearance, much the worse for wear, having been kept a prisoner in the Kanawha mountains by a party of thick-skulled moonshiners with revolvers, who were so persuaded he was a revenue detective, that only his small size and obvious inoffensiveness induced them finally to believe his story and release him.

From that time forward the show was a tremendous success, and King Philip, the hero of so many ferocious memories, became the greatest card after Lion Charley.

When a show succeeds, there is no way of making money so fascinating and delightful, and from that day forth Pop Hicks's show was crammed at every town, and had to make two-day stands at places that had formerly been thought unsafe for one day.

At the end of the season Pop came in with a handsome balance to his credit, and went into winter-quarters with all hands as "happy as clams at high water," as he said.

When "Pop Hicks's Great Show" started out next spring, it had the road all to itself, and the reader may be interested in seeing a list of its principal attractions as stated on the bills for the day, which ran as follows:

MESSRS. HICKS AND MOONE Managers.

MR. C. H. MOONE..... Advance Manager.

PROFESSOR RABBETTS..... Ringmaster.

MR. TOM FOWLER,
Premiere Bareback Rider.

MRS. TOM FOWLER (nee M'lle Hippolyte),
Premiere Lady Rider.

MR. CHARLES NOBLE
AND

MRS. CHARLES NOBLE (nee Miss Sally Hicks),
In their unparalleled act entitled "The Lords of
Creation," introducing a den of trained lions
and tigers.

MR. JAMES PERKINS (*Elephant Jim*),
with his magnificent Elephant,
KING PHILIP,

THE LARGEST ELEPHANT IN THE WORLD
as tame as a dog.

With a host of other attractions too numerous to mention.

Admission..... 50 cents.

Children half-price. Children in arms free.

That show prospered so well that next year the firm name was "Moone and Hicks"—Pop having retired on his money, and little Moone makes money now.

Onion George went into the museum business and failed.

THE END.

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